

# "Examining the Work-Home Interface: An Ecological Systems Perspective"

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation outlines a mixed-methods investigation of work-life balance, examining the construct from an ecological systems theory perspective. This necessitated research at the individual, group, organisational and wider societal levels and included three studies: two using quantitative methodology and one using qualitative.

The quantitative phase included two studies that examined the experience of the home-work interface from the perspective of the employee, examining the impact of demographic differences, job design and organisational work-life balance culture on both their work-life balance satisfaction and actual outcomes of work and home domain interaction. This revealed the key role of demographic differences in employees' satisfaction with work-life balance culture and the moderating role of work locus of control in the relationship between negative domain interaction outcomes and self-reported wellbeing.

The qualitative phase involved interviews with senior organisational stakeholders involved in the formulation and deployment of work-life balance policy. Thematic analysis of interview scripts revealed their implicit and explicit limited categorisation of employees when considering work-life balance needs; the gendered nature of their flexible working policies; the key role of line managers in the interpretation and implementation of policy; the impact of communication technology on the interface between work and home domains and the very limited extent of evaluation carried out on flexible-working policies.

Taken together, the data paint a complex but illuminating contemporary picture of the nature of work-life balance in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland and support the adoption of an ecological systems perspective when examining work-life balance.

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>PREFACE .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>13</b>
1.1 A Conceptual Review of Work-Life Balance .....	15
1.2 Adopting An Ecological Systems Perspective.....	44
1.3 Aims of the Present Research .....	70
1.4 Chapter Summary .....	77
<b>2. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>78</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	78
2.2 What is a Mixed Methods approach? .....	78
2.3 Defining the Mixed Methods approach.....	79
2.4 Why conduct Mixed Methods Research?.....	82
2.5 The Merits of Mixed Methods Research .....	85
2.6 Difficulties Associated with the Mixed Methods Approach .....	86
2.7 Mixed Methods and the Scientist-Practitioner.....	87
2.8 Methodological Rationale of the present research.....	89
2.9 Chapter Summary .....	92

<b>3. RESULTS – QUANTITATIVE STUDIES .....</b>	<b>93</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	93
3.2 Measures .....	95
3.3 Methodology – Phase 1 .....	105
3.4 Results – Phase 1 .....	108
3.5 Methodology – Phase 2 .....	136
3.6 Results – Phase 2 .....	138
3.7 Discussion .....	143
3.8 Chapter Summary .....	152
<b>4. RESULTS – QUALITATIVE STUDY .....</b>	<b>153</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	153
4.2 Methodology .....	154
4.3 Results .....	163
4.4 Discussion .....	225
4.5 Limitations of the present study .....	232
4.6 Chapter Summary .....	234
<b>5. DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>235</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	235
5.2 Synthesis of Results .....	236
5.3 Benefits of a Mixed Methods Approach .....	244
5.4 Implications of the Results .....	245

5.5 Potential Methodological Weaknesses .....	256
5.6 Suggestions for Future Research .....	261
<b>6. CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: ONLINE SURVEY MEASURES .....</b>	<b>283</b>
1. Work-Life Balance Culture .....	283
2. Dutch Questionnaire on The Experience and Assessment of Work (VBBA) .....	285
3. SWING (Survey Work-Home Interface Nijmegen) .....	287
4. Cybernetic Coping Scale.....	289
5. Work-Life Balance Attitudes Measure .....	290
6. General Health Questionnaire - GHQ12 .....	292
<b>APPENDIX B: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS – INITIAL QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>295</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT AND CODES .....</b>	<b>296</b>

## List of Tables

<b>TABLE 1.1 – ALIGNMENT OF RESEARCH AIMS, LEVELS OF INQUIRY, RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND THEMES ADDRESSED .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>TABLE 3.1 – ALIGNMENT OF RESEARCH AIMS, LEVELS OF INQUIRY, HYPOTHESES AND THEMES .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>TABLE 3.2 – STRUCTURE, SAMPLE ITEMS AND PROPERTIES OF THE SWING QUESTIONNAIRE .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>TABLE 3.3 – STRUCTURE AND PROPERTIES OF THE CYBERNETIC COPING SCALE.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>TABLE 3.4 – STRUCTURE AND PROPERTIES OF THE MEASURE OF ORGANISATIONAL WORK-LIFE BALANCE CULTURE .....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>TABLE 3.5 – STRUCTURE AND PROPERTIES OF THE VBBA.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>TABLE 3.6 – ALIGNMENT OF MEASURES AGAINST RESEARCH AIMS AND THEMES .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>TABLE 3.7 – OVERALL RESULTS OF SWING MEASURE .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>TABLE 3.8 – SWING SCALES EXPRESSED AS MEANS OF MEANS .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>TABLE 3.9 – NEGATIVE DOMAIN INTERACTION FOR MALES AND FEMALES .....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>TABLE 3.10 – NEGATIVE DOMAIN INTERACTION FOR PARENTS AND NON-PARENTS.....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>TABLE 3.11 – NEGATIVE DOMAIN INTERACTION FOR CARERS AND NON-CARERS .....</b>	<b>112</b>

<b>TABLE 3.12 – NEGATIVE DOMAIN INTERACTION FOR HETEROSEXUALS AND GAYS/LESBIANS .....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>TABLE 3.13 – NEGATIVE DOMAIN INTERACTION FOR MARRIED/PARTNERED AND SINGLES .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>TABLE 3.14 – OVERALL LEVELS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE SATISFACTION.....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>TABLE 3.15 CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SWING SCALES AND WLB SATISFACTION.....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>TABLE 3.16 RESULTS OF STEPWISE REGRESSION OF WLB ITEM ONTO SWING SCALES .....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>TABLE 3.17 – OVERALL SCORES ON THE GENERAL HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE (GHQ12).....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>TABLE 3.18 CORRELATIONS BETWEEN NEGATIVE SWING SCALES AND GHQ12 .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>TABLE 3.19 – OVERALL RESULTS FOR THE WORK LOCUS OF CONTROL SCALE (WLCS) .....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>TABLE 3.20 – CORRELATIONS BETWEEN NEGATIVE SWING SCALES AND LOCUS OF CONTROL .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>TABLE 3.21 – CORRELATIONS BETWEEN POSITIVE SWING SCALES AND WORK LOCUS OF CONTROL .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>TABLE 3.22 – SCALE RELIABILITY FOR THE CYBERNETIC COPING SCALE .....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>TABLE 3.23 – SUMMARY OF ORGANISATIONAL WORK-LIFE BALANCE CULTURE .....</b>	<b>126</b>



<b>TABLE 3.24 – CORRELATIONS BETWEEN POSITIVE ORGANISATIONAL WORK-LIFE BALANCE CULTURE SCALES AND NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE WORK-TO-HOME INTERACTION .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>TABLE 3.25 – CORRELATIONS BETWEEN VBBA SCALES AND NEGATIVE SWING SCALES .....</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>TABLE 3.26 – MULTIPLE REGRESSION: NWHI, WORK-LIFE BALANCE CULTURE AND VBBA SCALES .....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>TABLE 3.27 – CORRELATIONS BETWEEN VBBA SCALES AND WORK- LIFE BALANCE SATISFACTION .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>TABLE 3.28 – DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS: WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF RECESSION.....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>TABLE 4.1 – CODES RELATING TO THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY .....</b>	<b>160</b>

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## **Preface**

The following document presents the results of a mixed methods research project investigating work-life balance from an ecological systems perspective. This perspective acknowledges the impact of individual differences, organisational culture and societal context on employees' experience of the work-home interface.

**Chapter 1** begins with a conceptual review of the work-life balance construct and how it has evolved over the last fifty years, alongside the societal and occupational developments that have preceded theoretical evolution. The relevance of the Ecological Systems perspective is presented, and the key variables that impact employees' experience of the interface between work and personal domains of life are presented in terms of a multi-level hierarchy including individual, organisational and societal factors. The chapter closes with a presentation of the aims and objectives of the research.

**Chapter 2** discusses the mixed methods approach adopted for this research, describing the value such an orientation brings to work-life balance research. The chapter closes with a statement on the epistemological position of the researcher and how this has influenced the research design.

**Chapter 3** presents the results of the quantitative study, which itself is divided into two phases. Phase one describes the results of a survey to examine employees' perceptions of their own work-life balance, their organisation's orientation towards flexible working arrangements and their own wellbeing. Phase two sets out the results of a survey to examine employee perceptions of

the impact of the economic context on their own experience of work-life balance.

**Chapter 4** presents the results of the qualitative study, based on interviews conducted with senior organisational stakeholders responsible for the formulation and/or deployment of work-life balance related policy.

**Chapter 5** constitutes a discussion of results from the preceding chapters and presents them in the light of the original research aims and objectives, addressing potential methodological weaknesses and highlighting implications for practice and future research.

## 1. Introduction

The growth in interest in work-life balance has resulted in a plethora of research approaches, contrasting operational definitions and foci for research (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Burke & Greenglass, 1987).

This chapter begins with a conceptual review of work-life balance, beginning with an examination of how language and terminology have impacted our understanding and interpretation of the interface between work and home domains. The societal and occupational changes that provide context for work-life balance are then outlined.

Next, the evolution of work-life balance from earlier frameworks in the 1960s to its more recent conceptualisations is presented, alongside the methodological criticisms levelled at these approaches.

Reflecting the ecological systems theory perspective outlined in the conceptual review, the relevance of work-life balance is presented at multiple levels of experience, along with a review of the variables that can impact employees, organisations and society as a whole at each level.

From the perspective of the **individual employee**, this includes an exploration of the work-life balance concept through the prism of diversity and individual differences. This includes an examination of gender, sexual orientation and relationship status in terms of demographic factors that impact employees' experience of the work-home interface. In terms of **individual differences**, the roles of locus of control and coping strategies are examined. Both have been implicated as important factors in the job-related stress literature, within which

the work-home interface has been consistently identified as a stressor (O'Driscoll, 1996; Cooper & Lewis, 1998; Cunningham & De La Rosa, 2008; Kirkcaldy, Shephard & Furnham, 2002). Both constructs are important in terms of examining behavioural responses to perceived imbalance between work and home domains.

Next, the **organisational perspective** is explored, highlighting the role of both job design and organisational culture in the employee experience of work-life balance, while simultaneously addressing the apparent gulf between policy deployment and employee take-up of flexible working arrangement.

In acknowledgement of the role played by national culture, recent data from across Europe are reviewed and placed in contrast to data from the United States, illustrating the need for **national and cultural contexts** to be considered. This is included in order to highlight the impact national context has on various inputs into the work-life equation such as: employment law, division of labour in the home and access to flexible working arrangements.

The **economic perspective** is then addressed, highlighting the importance of the prevailing economic climate in any discussion of work-life balance. As this research was conducted at the outset of a significant banking crisis in Europe and further afield, and considering work-life balance factors such as job design and job security are so inextricably linked, it is imperative to consider the wider socio-economic context.

Finally, the aims and objectives of this research are established and presented in terms of gaps in the existing research and the above methodological weaknesses.

## **1.1 A Conceptual Review of Work-Life Balance**

This section reviews the concept of work-life balance in four stages. Firstly, the important consideration of language and its impact on the conceptualisation and investigation of the construct is examined. This goes to the core of the matter by posing the very basic questions of what is meant by "work", "life" and "balance".

Next, a review of the societal and occupational developments that have led work-life balance to become a pre-eminent issue in contemporary psychological research is presented. This is followed by a summary of the methodological critiques levelled at much of the existing literature. Finally, a review of the competing theoretical frameworks that researchers have used to explain work-life balance is presented, along with the rationale for adopting an ecological systems perspective.

### **1.1.1 The Impact of Language**

Like many other research areas in the domain of psychology, the terminology used to address work-life balance has developed with time, in the most part reflecting an evolution of research focus. However, there still remains a plethora of terms used, seemingly interchangeably, to describe an examination of the interface between the workplace and an employee's home life. Probably the most popular term in use is a collective "Work-Life Balance", though a number of others are still in use: Work-Family Balance, Work-Family Conflict, Work-Family Interference, Work-Family Spillover and so on.

Subsequent sections of this chapter will attempt to clarify the theoretical and operational differences between these terms. However, there is a much deeper

issue with regard to language, meaning and interpretation of work-life balance issues. These explore the language and contexts used in the research to date, and highlight its limitations in addressing a more holistic view of the construct in question. Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli and Bell's 2010 critique of the positivist framework of previous research point to its limited scope of what "family" and "work" represent. They highlight these as "blind spots" in work-life research. Similarly, Geurts and Demerouti (2003) point out that there is little agreement as to what constitutes "work" and "non-work" and simultaneously highlight the difficulty this brings to a contemporary context in which previously distinct domains and roles have become increasingly interrelated.

### **What is Work?**

Traditional definitions of "work" involve reference to structured, paid employment (e.g. Warr, 2002). However, such references to the concept exclude effort-related activity that is done outside of formal employment. An example here would be the selection of domestic chores that are done in most households on a weekly basis (e.g. cleaning, gardening). Though the stakeholders are usually not paid for fulfilling these, they often involve physical labour and exertion, and yet because of their temporal or geographical context, are traditionally classified as being part of the non-work domain.

Similarly, work that is undertaken on a voluntary basis would also (traditionally) fall under the "life" banner if outside of formal employment contexts. Examples here would be work done for local religious or charitable organisations (e.g. visiting elderly neighbours with "meals on wheels", coaching youth sport teams, organising charity fundraising drives), especially where the employee's core



work-related skills are called into play. Consider the website developer who is employed Monday to Friday to develop and maintain corporate websites and at the weekends uses these same skills to develop and maintain a website for his local neighbourhood watch association. He is formally employed and paid to fulfil the former, but engages in the latter free of charge.

The contemporary work domain is not as distinct from the non-work domain, either spatially or temporally (Geurts & Demerouti, *ibid*) due to advances in technology and work design, which have freed work activity from fixed work environments and schedules. As work has increasingly impinged on the non-work domain, there is some evidence that the opposite is also true. Geurts and Demerouti (*ibid*) cite the example of concierge-type services offered in some organisations, which provide personal care services to employees at work (e.g. picking up laundry, arranging travel) as well as work-based fitness facilities and child care centres.

While temporally and geographically "at work", many employees can now access the internet to complete home domain tasks (e.g. online grocery shopping, holiday planning, personal email exchanges).

### **What is Family?**

Discussion of work-life balance has been influenced (and potentially limited) by the terminology used to describe the concept, particularly its limited interpretations of the word "family". Several researchers have recently critiqued the existing research for an over-emphasis on narrow and traditional definitions of "family" (e.g. Ozbilgin et al, 2010; Moen, 2010; Crane & Hill, 2009). Use of the term "family" is problematic for a number of reasons.

Firstly, a restrictive definition of the term excludes those individuals for whom home life does not conform to the traditional concept of nuclear family (i.e. a co-habiting, married man and woman with children). It excludes single-parent families, same-sex relationships (whether formally state-recognised or not; whether involving the raising of children or not), childless couples and, of course, single people without any caring responsibilities.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe, "Family" as a concept now encompasses a much broader range of relationships and generations than the "traditional" co-habiting married husband and wife with children. Previous research into work-life balance has made the mistake of conflating "family" with this traditional structure, a failing that is explored in more depth later in this chapter. As Barnett and Hyde (2001) point out:

*"The lives of women and men, the relationships that they establish, and their work have changed dramatically in the last 50 years, but the dominant theories driving research in these areas have not."* (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p781)

A second failing of the "work-family" framework is that it has an implicit focus on home, or domestic, life. It excludes all of the other activities an employee may be involved in outside of the workplace which may include educational or developmental activities, sport and leisure activities, social and religious activities. A focus on "work-family balance" for example, immediately places importance on family life, as opposed to all of an employee's experience outside the workplace.

Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood and Lambert (2007) emphasise the need to acknowledge the requirements and contexts of single employees and those without children and highlight the paucity of measures sensitive to their situations.

Traditional definitions of "family" are now insufficient to deal with the diversity of familial units that make up the modern employee pool. David Popenoe's (1993) assertion that the American family is in decline and his belief that this was an extremely unwelcome development echoes much of the reactionary social commentary experienced by modern family units. Popenoe (ibid) asserts that to count as a family, there needs to be a dependent (child or adult) in the mix:

*"I define the family as a relatively small domestic group of kin (or people in a kin-like relationship) consisting of at least one adult and one dependent person. This definition is meant to refer particularly to an intergenerational unit that includes (or once included) children, but handicapped and infirm adults, the elderly and other dependents also qualify."* (Popenoe, 1993, p529)

As Turner and West (2006) point out, despite including gay and lesbian families, single parent families and stepfamilies, Popenoe excludes couples without children. A new terminology is therefore required to avoid continuation of limited and limiting definitions of what constitutes the "family" domain when examining the interface between work and home.

## **What is Balance?**

The term "balance" is also problematic. "Balance" suggests a 50/50 split between work and home life, a ratio that may not suit everyone, while simultaneously suggesting that balance between the two domains is possible, even desirable. Lewis (2003) points to work-life *integration* as a suitable and more accurate alternative to work-life balance as it better represents reality. "Integration" speaks to the ongoing, dynamic efforts employees make to ensure the work and non-work domains of life co-exist in a complimentary, as opposed to mutually-destructive, relationship.

Moen and Hernandez (2009) also critique the use of the term balance, pointing out the inherent inference that "balance" places the focus on the individual's challenges, rather than on societal or organisational issues which place the individual in an undesirable position in the first place.

Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport (2007) make the distinction between the narratives of "personal control of time" and that of "workplace flexibility". The first places the onus on the individual employee to balance the various demands placed upon them in both work and non-work domains, intimating that responsibility for managing this lies with the employee.

The second focuses on the process- and policy-led narrative in organisations, such that employers "allow" employees a measure of job flexibility through explicit communication and policies. Take-up of such flexibility is another matter, and the culture of the organisation may relate a message of undesirability (e.g. negative impact on career advancement) associated with

flexibility, regardless of what is explicitly stated in policy documents (Burke, 2006).

This second narrative assumes that organisational policy-making is the solution to work-life conflicts, rather than taking a holistic view of the employee experience – that is, as a member of a wider community and a national workforce (Lewis et al, 2007).

Acknowledging the above critique of the terminology, a more neutral alternative may be to distinguish between the "work" and "non-work" domains, while referring to the interactions between the two as the "work-home interface". This excludes any possible exclusion of "non-traditional" family units and also serves to include non-work activities or obligations not directly related to family members (e.g. sport and leisure). The term "work-life balance" will be used henceforth to refer to the research topic as a whole.

### **1.1.2 Work-Life Balance: Societal and Occupational Evolution**

The current interest in work-life balance as a topic for research has its roots in changes to the make-up of the modern workforce that began in the 1960s. To the contemporary observer, the modern workplace bears little resemblance to that of fifty years ago for many European employees. Changes to the make-up of the employee population, changes to the nature of what constitutes work and where it can be conducted and the inevitable technological advances have combined to impact the experience of work in a significant way.

Societal and market changes have combined to require more flexible and adaptive organisations – and, of course, employees to fulfil the work of these organisations.

*"As time expands in the global 24-hour market place, and space and distance are compressed by information and communication technology, temporal and spatial boundaries between paid work and personal life have become increasingly blurred"* (Lewis, 2003, p343).

Cooper and Jackson (1997) outline the significant shifts in social and workplace environments taking place by the late 1990s, and it is key that a construct such as work-life balance, impacted by multiple layers of socio-economic variables, needs to be examined in the light of such wider change.

Up to and including the 1950's, the focus of most comparable research in this area was on families under stress. It included an examination of the experience of families in the Great Depression (US) and the impact of the Second World War on the world of work – that is, the absence of many male breadwinners (Moen, 2010).

In the 1960s, societal liberalisation and other associated changes resulted in far more women in the workforce (outside of wartime) than ever before. This was partly due to the growth of the service sector, where there were more roles available for women, and partly due to an increase in women wanting to return to work following the birth of their children – or indeed, more intentional family planning. However, the pressures that these women felt in balancing the demands of the workplace and of their home lives sparked an examination of

what it was to be a working mother, quickly followed by research into the roles played by the "modern" working father (Moen, *ibid*).

A logical consequence of this increase in the number of working mothers was an increase in the number of dual-earner families, which in turn put additional strain on the home life of many employees. Traditional division of labour in the home (at least in Western European terms) highlighted the potential for friction between the work and home roles of women (Bianchi, 2010). In other words, there was no corresponding change to the division of labour in the home domain, with the result that working women had, in effect, two jobs: one paid, outside the home and one unpaid, at home.

A further consequence of this increase in women at work – now working in more senior positions and thinking in terms of a career – was that women were moving into jobs created by and for men. They were working to schedules and within roles that suited the demands of men, and which did not take account of the dual responsibility many of these women had as mothers. Moen and Roehling (2005) refer to this as the "career mystique". That is, the expectation that continuous, full-time employment is the path to fulfilment, and that the growing number of women in the workforce began to accept this as fact. In doing so, they flexed around the pre-existing standards of what it meant to be "at work", standards set by men without the experience of inter-domain friction and workload of women.

*"Equality' meant moving into men's jobs, replete with taken-for-granted rules, regulations, and expectations about the temporal organisation of work – the time clocks and calendars predicated on a largely male*

*workforce with no family-care responsibilities, or else on poor women workers who relied on their networks of kin and friends to look after their children"* (Moen, 2010 p3).

In the 1970s, organisations began to acknowledge and respond to the pressures experienced by their female employees and started offering various forms of childcare support, which in turn drew the attention of social researchers wishing to evaluate their impact and effectiveness.

The 1980s saw the growth in popularity of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), a catch-all term for employer-funded support for employees in terms of well-being. These tended to focus on interventions to avoid home life interfering with performance and attendance at work, setting the tone for much of the psychological research in this decade: the impact of home circumstances on the workplace and, in particular, where this impact is negative. Much of the focus of EAPs was tertiary in nature – that is, it aimed to address employee wellbeing only after said wellbeing had been negatively impacted by workplace factors.

The 1980s also saw the rise of explicit references to "work-life balance" itself, though this was normally focused on attempts female employees made to balance the demands of home and work, with an emphasis on temporal imbalance (Moen, 2010). That is, how to best balance working hours and their domestic caregiver role. One outcome of this focus was a common misconception that work and personal life should be viewed as a zero-sum game (Harvard Business Review, 2000). In other words, an employer's



perspective of: "What you do in the office is our business. What you do outside is your own" (Friedman, Christensen and DeGroot, 2000, p2).

From the 1990s onwards, a need for workplace flexibility, in order to better balance employees' work and non-work lives, was being cited by more and more employees as a key deciding factor when job-seeking.

### **The Contemporary Workplace**

The modern workplace, while being arguably superior in many aspects compared to its historical manifestations (e.g. in terms of safety, access to employee support programmes, improved technology and so on) is far from perfect. A number of modern factors combine to represent risks for the contemporary employee and these include:

**The demographic make-up of the modern workforce:** Women's increasing participation in the workforce is undoubtedly a major consideration when examining work-life balance. However, changes have not just impacted female employees. Male employees are now spending more time engaged in home-based activities (e.g. housework, childcare) than ever before (Sayer, 2005), mirroring some of the pressures faced by women at work (Bianchi, Robinson & Milkie, 2006; Bittman, 2000). This development has by no means equalised the division of labour in the home, but instead has served to increase the proportion of employees facing increased personal demands in their home domain.

As Bianchi and Milkie (2010) point out in their review of the first decade of work-life balance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the increased diversity of what constitutes a

"family" and "workplace" represents what they term a "defining trend of the 2000 – 2010 decade".

**Changes to the nature of work itself:** What we term "work" now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has evolved considerably from the type of work our predecessors did in the 1950s. There has been an explosion in the knowledge-based economy, reliant on the production of ideas and expertise rather than physical and tangible products. This has lent itself to a different kind of workplace, characterised in many cases by the prevalence of communication tools (e.g. email, telephones) and how the work itself is carried out (cooperative meetings, tele- or video-conferences) rather than a production facility (Schieman, Milkie & Glavin, 2009).

We have also witnessed a progressive globalisation of work, which has resulted in a 24-hour society (Presser, 2003). For organisations, this has necessitated constant awareness of global developments and sensitivity to activity across multiple time zones, while for the employee, it has seen developments in where and when work is carried out (Schieman, Milkie & Glavin, 2009) impacting their attempts at balancing the two main domains of work and home (Bianchi, Robinson & Milkie, 2006).

Related to this has been an increase in the general provision of flexible working arrangements – for many employees, the modern workplace means much more flexibility in how they carry out their work. Flexible working arrangements such as compressed hours (working a full working week across fewer days), term-time working for parents, flexible weekly shifts and so on have introduced a whole level of flexibility to when work is actually carried out. However, as Kelly

and Moen (2007) point out, flexible working arrangements represent a minority manifestation of working practices and there remains a "fundamental temporal organisation of work" (Moen, 2010 p.4) with the intact

*"...norms and expectations of...8 hours or more work days, 5 day or more work weeks, 48 or more weeks work years and a lifetime of continuous work until death or retirement, whichever comes first" (Moen, ibid p.13).*

**The impact of information technology:** For many employees, recent advances in information technology have freed them from a single location for work. Laptop computers, mobile phones and instant email devices such as the Blackberry and iPhone mean that employees engaged in "information work" can effectively be productive regardless of their location. (Hill et al, 2003). Quesenberry and Trauth (2005) referred to the increase in "ubiquitous computing", facilitated by information technology that simplifies such information work. They define ubiquitous computing as:

*"...situations where multiple computers are invisible, indistinguishable and available to an individual throughout a physical environment and thus woven into the fabric of everyday life." (Quesenberry & Trauth, 2005, p47).*

A prime example of this kind of computing is the Blackberry, so popular in modern corporate environments. These devices provide employees with instant and constantly updated access to their corporate (and in some cases, personal)

email. The implication of the Blackberry is that the employee can "stay on top of" email communications even when away from their desk, when commuting or indeed working from home. They can manage and update their schedules via electronic calendars, accepting or rejecting invitations to meetings or conference calls as required. Similar technology based on access to the internet via remote or laptop computers can provide employees with access to all of their work-related files and other organisational information from wherever they are in the world. This kind of technological advancement has reduced the need for many to be present in a static work environment for their entire working week and has facilitated more flexible approaches to managing work and productivity.

However, with this flexibility comes the danger of blurred boundaries between work and personal domains. Remaining contactable outside of work – or merely the perception that this is somehow advantageous or even required – has its disadvantages. Duxbury and Higgins (2003) found that 70% of their 33,000 research participants felt that ubiquitous computing increased their stress levels. Similarly, Perrons (2003) and Sullivan and Lewis (2001) reported the presence of ubiquitous computing technology as a cause of blurred boundaries between work and home.

Mazmanian, Yates and Orlikowski (2006) reported the mixed impacts of ubiquitous email access via Blackberry devices in corporate environments, highlighting both the increased control the devices gave employees over the "pace and substance of information flow" but also the fact that use "encourages a compulsive checking of email and an inability to disengage from work". Turel, Seranko and Bontis (2008) explored "blackberry addiction" and indicated the

potential negative impact on work-life balance through employee over-reliance on, and compulsive checking of, email through ubiquitous email devices. Their research indicated over-use of such devices increased perceived workload and lead to what they termed "technology-family conflict".

### **1.1.3 Methodological Issues**

Before examining the numerous theoretical perspectives that have sought to best explain work-life balance, it is useful to highlight some of the over-arching methodological weaknesses apparent in this literature. A number of researchers (e.g. Casper et al, 2007, Schultheiss, 2006, Ozbilgin et al, 2010) have recently examined the work-life balance research base and found it lacking in multiple areas relating to the methodology deployed and theoretical frameworks underpinning the work. The most frequently cited criticisms are outlined below and set the scene for the rationale behind the research discussed in subsequent chapters.

#### **Over-reliance on cross-sectional, quantitative methodology**

Research on the work-home interface has been overwhelmingly quantitative, reflecting the quantitative bias that pervades occupational psychology and the positivist orientation of many work-life balance researchers. While the collection and analysis of quantitative data serves an important role in understanding employee perceptions of work-life balance, the addition of qualitative approaches brings an additional richness to the research and allows investigators to examine the meaning and experience of the concepts in question.

### **The use of poor measures**

The use of self-report measures (e.g. surveys) is held up as a weakness of much of the research to date. Casper et al's 2007 review of the work-life balance literature found that surveys were the most popular method used, with 85% of studies included in their meta-analysis including survey methodology. Self-report measures have a number of advantages, however, including the sampling of large groups of participants in an economical and efficient manner. Of more importance here is the content of these measures and their theoretical underpinnings. Measures used in previous research have in many cases conflated concepts and exhibited poor criterion validity, measuring only certain aspects of the entire work-life balance construct (Schultheiss, 2006).

### **Uni-directional focus**

Much of the existing research has adopted a uni-directional focus, primarily investigating the negative impacts of work-to-home imbalance. While research has also focused on conflict originating in the other domain (i.e. from home to work), very little has been conducted examining these phenomena concurrently and in a holistic way (Schultheiss, *ibid*).

### **Unrepresentative participant groups**

Schultheiss (2006) also highlights the unrepresentative nature of many participants in work-life balance research. She calls for a more inclusive definition of the term "family", which as noted earlier, when taken in the most literal sense, excludes single parents, un-married couples, same-sex couples

and couples without children. It also excludes those outside of any relationships: the single, childless employee.

Much of the research conducted in the US is difficult to generalise to a European context due to the significant differences in working culture, workplace legislation and approach to social welfare and social support.

Finally, the predominant research focus with regard to work-life balance has been on professional or "qualified" employees (Richardson and Rothstein, 2008), ignoring the experience of those in non-professional roles or less flexible work environments.

### **A focus on negative outcomes**

A number of researchers have over-emphasised the potential for work-life conflict, or 'Work-Family Conflict', setting the tone of the research agenda and in some ways, the interpretation of the high-level concept of work-life balance (Schultheiss, *ibid*). That is, attempts at balancing the demands of work and non-work are inherently challenging and have negative outcomes.

#### **1.1.4 Work-Life Balance: Conceptual Evolution**

There have been a number of competing theories seeking to explain how individuals manage the interface between their work and personal lives. It is therefore useful to clarify some of the constructs explored in the work-life research literature to help avoid the conflation of which researchers in this area have previously been accused. The following approaches and concepts are

arranged in a largely temporal order, with the older approaches outlined first and more recent developments presented last.

### **"Classical" conceptualisations of the work-home interface**

The earliest conceptualisations of how employees manage the interface between work and home (referred to as "Classical" hypotheses by Guerts & Demerouti, 2003) emphasise the separation of the domains.

The **Segmentation / Segregation hypothesis** (Dubin, 1956; Dubin & Champoux, 1977) posited that employees perceive the work and home domains to be separate, on numerous levels – including psychologically, physically and temporally. According to this hypothesis the demands of each domain make unique demands on the employee Guerts and Demerouti (ibid) point out that little evidence exists to support this hypothesis, but add that where segmentation does exist between domains, it can be due to the conscious efforts of the employee when attempting to prevent a negative impact of work demands on their home life.

Wilensky (1960) made a distinction between work-life **Compensation** – the process whereby employees compensate for dissatisfaction in one domain (e.g. work) by increasing their involvement in the other (e.g. family care) and derive their satisfaction from that domain – and **Spillover**, which describes the carrying over of negative affect from one domain (usually work) to the other. There is some evidence pointing to the impact of work activities on non-work activities, such that repetitive and process-oriented roles seemed to result in



employees engaging in similar non-work activities (e.g. Rousseau, 1978). Conflicting evidence (e.g. Mansfield & Evans, 1975) found the opposite to be true. Edwards and Rothbard (2000) refer to spillover as "effects of work and family on one another that generate similarities between the two domains." (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000, p180) and suggest that spillover need not necessarily be negative in nature. However, they also highlight a plethora of terms that have been used interchangeably with this, including: generalisation, isomorphism and extension. Further, they distinguish between two forms of spillover: one which represents similarity between constructs in the two domains (e.g. work satisfaction and family satisfaction) and the other which represents transfer of experiences from one domain to the other (e.g. displaying work-related fatigue when at home, which then impacts family functioning).

### **Role Strain / Scarcity Hypothesis**

This model posits that participation in one role (e.g. as an employee) has a negative impact on participation in others (e.g. as a mother) due to finite energy available to any individual in a given time period and thus leads to inter-role (and therefore inter-domain) conflict. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) examined this relationship in terms of conflict between work and family based on role participation and identified three distinct forms of conflict:

Firstly, **time-based conflict**, such that temporal pressure resulting from fulfilment of one role (e.g. long working hours) makes fulfilment of the other (e.g. caregiver at home) more difficult. **Strain-based conflict** occurs when negative psychological and physical outcomes of involvement in work (e.g. mental or physical fatigue) make the demands of the other role (e.g. leisure activities with

family) more onerous and difficult to fulfil. Finally, **behaviour-based conflict**, which occurs when specific patterns of behaviour that are associated with a given domain make fulfilment of the other domain more difficult. Guerts and Demerouti (ibid) cite the example of difficulties faced by employees when attempting to maintain a business-appropriate demeanour in the work domain and adopt a different set of more informal behaviours when in the home domain.

A further theoretical perspective emerging from the role theory perspective is **work-family conflict**, which specifically focuses on the negative consequences of unwanted domain interaction. Researchers such as Rothbard (2001) and Frone et al (1992b) have examined the perceived deleterious effect on employees who perform multiple roles in work and non-work domains. This research (e.g. Frone et al, 1992b) has tended to illustrate that inter-domain conflict is not evenly distributed, such that employees tend to report more work-to-home conflict than home-to-work. However, work-family conflict has been consistently found to be bi-directional (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Further, such research has simultaneously examined the role of stress in the work-home interface and the role of subjective perception of stressors in the stressor-strain relationship (e.g. Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1986). Edwards and Rothbard (1999) investigated the role of cognitive appraisal in this relationship, finding that employees' well-being in both domains increased when their appraisal of the domain interaction matched their subjective requirements.

Rantanen, Pulkkinen and Ulla Kinnunen (2005) pursued this line of enquiry, specifically examining the role of personality in such appraisal of domain

interaction and demonstrated the role of neuroticism in the manifestation of conflict between the domains, in both directions.

While these types of strain may well manifest in some employees as a result of unwelcome domain interaction, the Roles Strain / Scarcity Hypothesis and Work-Family Conflict perspectives have been superseded by theoretical perspectives which do not view inter-domain interaction in inevitably negative terms and these are discussed below.

### **Role Enhancement Hypothesis**

This hypothesis takes an opposite view to that of the conflict-focused approaches and (e.g. Marks, 1977) proposes that human energy is abundant and that participation in multiple roles actually facilitates meeting the roles' requirements. This view posits that compensation and spillover can't really be distinguished and may in fact operate simultaneously. Evidence for the positive impact of multiple role adoption has grown over the last decade. Barnett and Hyde (2001) state that:

*"...multiple roles are not harmful and are, in general, beneficial for women and men as reflected in mental health, physical health and relationship health"* (Barnet & Hyde, 2001, p 785).

Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler and Wethington (1989) demonstrated that increasing involvement in the workforce lowered symptoms of depression in a sample of unemployed mothers. Conversely, a decrease in working hours in a separate female sample was associated with an increase in depressive symptoms.

Barnett, Marshall and Pleck (1992) found that for men, psychological wellbeing benefitted equally from involvement in separate roles as father, spouse and employee. Such evidence counters the role scarcity hypothesis and seems to be more representative of the modern employee's experience of multiple role fulfilment.

Barnett and Hyde (ibid) propose that several processes contribute to the positive effects results from multiple role fulfilment, including a buffering effect between roles, the additional income resulting from increased involvement in paid work and the increased opportunities for social support afforded by multiple role involvement. They also point to the increased opportunities for such multiple role adoptees to experience success – that is, to develop their self-confidence and self-efficacy.

However, there appear to be limits to the positive impact of multiple life roles. Voydanoff and Donnelly (1989) found a curvilinear relationship between time spent in roles and psychological distress. They found that both number of roles and time spent in any given roles have upper maximum levels before psychological distress is experienced.

### **Conservation of Resources Theory**

The Conservation of Resources Model (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989) more frequently associated with research into occupational stress processes, has been suggested as a useful alternative framework for understanding the processes underlying employees' experience of the work-home interface (Grandey &

Cropanzano, 1999). Essentially, COR proposes that employees seek to acquire and maintain resources, which may take the form of specific conditions or experiences (e.g. paid employment, parenthood), emotions (satisfaction), or energies (e.g. motivation, monetary reward).

As such, employees experience a negative reaction when these resources are threatened, depleted or a potential threat to the resources is identified. In contrast to models that emphasise differences and potential for conflict between roles and the domains in which they reside, applying COR to the work-home interface suggests that involvement in multiple domains and roles may be necessary as the different resources may only be attainable through such involvement (e.g. salary and job satisfaction from the work domain; parenthood and self-development in the home domain).

However, while research has demonstrated the value of the COR model in understanding the relationship between the work-home interface and psychological strain (e.g. Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999) much of the work conducted within this COR framework has suffered from the same conceptual limitations referred to in section 1.1.1. of this chapter. Namely, conflation of "family" with home, or personal life and framing of the phenomenon as "work-family conflict", which assumes negative interaction between the domains.

### **Work-Family Facilitation**

This perspective counters the negative tone of preceding theoretical models of work and non-work domains by proposing that the domains can in fact *benefit* each other, rather than inevitably detract from each other (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson & Kacmar, 2007). Frone (2003) defined work-family facilitation as "the

extent to which participation at work (home) is made easier by virtue of the experiences, skills, and opportunities gained or developed at home (work)" (p. 145). Wayne et al (ibid) critiqued the lack of research evidence in support of facilitation, as well as the perceived lack of theory of the facilitation research to date. Their definition of facilitation sets it apart from the other positively-orientated model of spillover by emphasising additional factors: these include viewing individuals, not as passive players in the interaction between domains and roles in their lives, but as growth-oriented individuals who have a tendency to positivity and development. They therefore actively pursue required resources and success in this is also a measure of their environment and their personal characteristics.

Alis and O'Driscoll (2008) also explored the facilitation perspective, making a distinction between domains and roles – something that previous research in work-life balance has tended to blur. In their paper they distinguish between two roles within the non-work domain (family and personal benefit activities). They also moved away from a sole focus on time-based conflict emphasising the additional importance of psychological domain involvement. They highlighted the positive impact of deep involvement in personal benefit activities for both wellbeing and facilitation between the work and non-work domains while reinforcing the theoretical benefits of measuring both inter-domain conflict and facilitation to provide a more rounded view of the employee experience.

### **Work/Family Border Theory**

Clark (2000) has proposed an alternative conceptualisation of the work-home interface wherein employees are metaphorical "border-crossers" moving

between domains and across the work-home interface. The nature of the interface will change from permeable (when work and home domains are similar) to strong (when the domains differ significantly) and in addition, employees are purposeful actors in this process and work to shape the border between domains based on conscious consideration of their needs and the relative demands of the domains.

Key to this concept is the variable of "influence", in that for employees with relative influence in their domain ("central participants"), shaping the nature of the border will be easier than for those who Clark labels "peripheral participants". The latter are more likely to experience inter-domain conflict. Relative influence can be due to a variety of factors including integration with the culture of the domain or engagement with the other players (e.g. colleagues at work, family members or friends at home).

While attractive, there is a relative paucity of research evidence to support this theory, which also fails to include an explanatory mechanism for the experience of overload in either domain.

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

Grzywacz and Marks (2000) critiqued these earlier theories linking work and home as being deterministic and "not helpful for understanding and explaining the secular complexities of modern work-family arrangements" (Grzywacz & Marks, *ibid*, p112). They also pointed to evidence that participation in both work and home domains has a positive impact, indicating that additional variables are

at play when the interface between work and home results in negative outcomes for employees.

In an attempt to identify some of these additional factors, they turned to Ecological Systems theory, advanced by developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner. Proposed within the context of child development, this theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Bronfenbrenner, 1999) posits that development and children's interaction with the world around them must be examined from a series of complimentary perspectives.

Firstly, there is the microsystem, which includes factors such as cognition, emotion and biology. This interacts with, and is influenced by, the mesosystem, which includes the influences of family, school and immediate environment. Bronfenbrenner's exosystem includes the interaction between proximate and distal environments, such as the influence a parent's workplace has on a child's experience of home. A further factor is the macrosystem, which includes the culture in which the individual and their family live, as well as their socioeconomic status.

Grzywacz and Marks (ibid) emphasised the need to take account of these multiple levels of experience in any examination of the work-home interface. They pointed to the importance of gender and personality traits in understanding how person-environment interactions occur and shape the experience of the work-home interface. Their inclusion of these additional factors represents a more holistic and inclusive conceptualisation of work-life balance. Importantly, they proposed that different individual characteristics (e.g. gender, personality) can moderate the effect of contextual factors on person-



environment interactions, necessitating their inclusion in any examination of the work-home interface for a full understanding of the dynamics at play.

Testing their theoretical model, Grzywacz and Marks (2000) survey 1,986 employees and demonstrated the impact of gender, family support, job-related pressure on the experience of the work-home interface and that the presence or absence of various ecological resources (e.g. support from others at home or work, decision-latitude) impacted spillover between the work and home domains.

They also found evidence for a model of spillover that is orthogonal, rather than isomorphic. That is, the four pathways through which the domains can impact each other (positive work-to-home spillover, negative work-to-home spillover, positive home-to-work spillover and negative home-to-work spillover) are distinct and not simply the same pathway viewed from opposing perspectives. This conceptualisation of interaction between the domains is more fully explored in the section below.

## **Domain Interaction**

A more recent approach to considering the work-home interface and experience of employees has been that proposed by Geurts and colleagues (Bakker & Geurts, 2004; Geurts, Taris, Kompier, Dijkers, van Hoof & Kinnunen, 2005; Geurts, Beckers & Taris, 2008) which emphasises interaction between work and non-work domains and considers the relationships between domains from a bi-directional perspective (work can influence home as well as vice versa) while

simultaneously considering how the domains can impact each other positively as well as negatively. This model moves away from a simplistic uni-directional (usually work-to-home) focus, which pre-supposes domain conflict in much of the earlier literature.

Further, the model proposes four potential interactions: negative work-to-home interaction (NWHI), positive work-to-home interaction (PWHI), negative home-to-work interaction (NHWI) and positive home-to-work interaction (PHWI). The domain interaction approach is beneficial when compared to earlier models of the work-life interface as it is effectively gender-neutral, does not pre-suppose either the direction or the nature of the interaction, leaving open the potential for work to positively impact the experience of employees at home and for positive experiences in the home domain to create the potential for a more positive work experience.

This approach compliments that of the ecological systems theory approach, in that ecological systems theory provides an inclusive framework within which to examine and understand the interface between work and home, taking account of the multiple levels of experience that can impact this interface. The domain interaction approach emphasises the potential for impact to be bi-directional and either positive or negative.

Additionally, it emphasises outcomes of domain interaction, rather than general satisfaction with work-life balance. Previous measures have been critiqued (e.g. by Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003) for over-emphasising the affective rather than objective elements of work-life balance. Geurts et al (2005) developed a measure (the SWING questionnaire) that emphasises experiential outcomes

from the work-home interface, as opposed to satisfaction with "work-life balance" as a single construct. Thus the work-home interface is measured in terms of frequency of outcomes (both positive and negative) to provide a holistic view of an employee's experience moving between the domains. The SWING questionnaire is described in detail in section 3.2.

## **Summary**

There are therefore a number of competing models attempting to explain work-life balance, some with more supporting evidence than others. The more recent conceptualisations seem better aligned with the challenges of the modern workplace and modern definitions of the family unit.

This research project examines the work-home interface from an ecological systems perspective – as it acknowledges the multiple levels of experience that impact an individual's work-home interface and is therefore a more complete and holistic conceptualisation of the construct than its deterministic predecessors. Considering the evidence for a changing workplace and changed workforce (as set out earlier in this chapter) this perspective on work-life balance provides the researcher with the opportunity to more fully understand the employee experience.

The relevance of this perspective is more fully explored in section 1.2, along with the various levels of experience that underpin the present research.

## **1.2 Adopting An Ecological Systems Perspective**

Reflecting the inclusive orientation of the Ecological Systems perspective (as per Grzywacz & Marks, 2000) when applied to work-life balance, it is appropriate to examine the variables that may influence the experience of the work-home interface for employees. The following section explores these variables from four perspectives: that of the individual employee, the organisational perspective, the national/cultural level and finally the perspective of the economic context. This largely mirrors the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-system perspectives inherent in the ecological systems approach, while also reflecting the multiple layers of investigation adopted for the present research project.

### **1.2.1 The Individual Level**

#### **The Relevance of Examining Work-life Balance at the Individual Level**

Work is an important determinant of health and wellbeing. Research into occupational stress has long highlighted the interface between work and home as a potential stressor and researchers have presented complimentary and sometimes conflicting theories on the dynamics of job-related stress (e.g. Karasek, 1979; Karasek, 1998; Godin, 2003; Siegrist, 2001).

Dissatisfaction with, and imbalance between, work and personal demands have been implicated in the pathology of several negative outcomes at the individual level. Frone (2000) found that both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict were:

*"...positively related to having a mood, anxiety, and substance dependence disorder. Depending on the type of work-family conflict and type of disorder, employees who reported experiencing work-family conflict often were 1.99-29.66 times more likely than were employees who reported no work-family conflict to experience a clinically significant mental health problem."* (Frone, 2000, p888)

MacEwan and Barling (1994) demonstrated the link between increased work-life "imbalance" and increased risk of anxiety and depression, and further illustrated how gender differences became apparent when the direction of imbalance was taken into account. They found that female employees experienced more distress as a result of work-to-family imbalance, whereas male employees experienced more distress under conditions of family-to-work imbalance. In their meta-analysis of the work-life balance literature, Joyce, Pabayo, Critchley, and Bamba (2010) illustrated that flexible working alternatives (e.g. self-scheduling) are associated with improvements in physical health (e.g. lowered blood pressure, improved sleep quality) and mental health (e.g. reduced psychological stress).

In summary, existing research has established significant links between imbalance between work and home domains and a host of undesirable physical and psychological outcomes for employees, highlighting the relevance of work-life balance as a focus of research for the individual employee.

## **Factors relevant to work-life balance at the individual level**

A number of factors can impact the experience of the work-home interface at the individual level. These include both demographic factors (i.e. gender, sexual orientation, relationship status and caring responsibilities) and aspects of personality (i.e. locus of control and coping strategies).

### **1. Gender**

There is a considerable research base illustrating workplace inequalities based on gender (Geurts and Demerouti, 2003) and the unequal distribution of labour between the genders in the home. Women are disadvantaged on a number of fronts, though legislation has attempted to address this inequality by acknowledging the role of demands from the home domain and highlighting the need for flexible working arrangements (e.g. The Equality Act, 2010 in the UK which enshrines the rights of working parents to request flexible working arrangements, protects the rights of breastfeeding mothers, and extends the employment rights of new mothers and pregnant employees).

However, the negative impacts of gender on the work-home interface are not unique to women. Butler and Skattebo (2004) reported that men who experienced work-family conflict received lower overall performance ratings and lower reward recommendations than men who did not. This was not apparent in their female sample. This points to the pressure many male employees experience to keep their private lives completely segregated from the workplace, whereas for women, it can be argued there are significantly more established mechanisms in place to deal with the challenges they face – these include legislation to provide for maternity leave, tax credits for childcare costs

and so on. Paternity leave itself is still a relatively modern concept. Lewis et al (2007) point out that most organisational work-life balance or flexible working initiatives fail to address men's non-work domain needs.

Ozbilgin et al (2010) also argue that there are other demographic variables of interest and gender should not be addressed as either a "women-only" issue or even as the prime demographic variable of research interest, to the detriment of other variables. These include: relationship status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class and race.

In an American context, Bianchi (2010) summarises the situation as follows:

*"In 2010, American mothers are still rushing about but in families that are far more complex and where women's labour force participation is arguably as important as men's participation to the economic well-being of their families" (Bianchi, ibid, p1).*

## **2. Sexual Orientation**

In terms of diversity at work, gender, race and many physical disabilities are visible manifestations of difference. However, invisible group differences such as sexual orientation have traditionally received less research attention (Tsui and Gutek, 1999). Sexual orientation is an example of an invisible difference that has the potential to impact an employee's experience of satisfaction at work, their workplace relationships, career trajectory and work-life balance.

Schultheiss (2006) points out that gay and lesbian employees face varying levels of discrimination and stigma in the workplace, adding to any difficulties they will face in managing the potential conflicts between work and personal life.

*"Lesbian and gay couples experience many of the same issues faced by heterosexual couples, including challenges associated with the work-family interface. However, lesbian and gay couples face these challenges within the context of stigma, isolation and invisibility" (Schultheiss, 2006, p335).*

Sexual orientation has consistently been identified as a potential stressor at work and workplace bullying and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation is consistently reported by gay advocacy groups, unions and researchers (e.g. Wright, Colgan, Creegan and McKearney 2006).

Nam Cam Trau and Hartel (2004) point out that there is a dearth of research on the experience of gay men at work (compared to that on the experience of lesbians, particularly when it comes to career progression) and that many researchers have been operating under the assumption that gay men face fewer obstacles at work compared to lesbians, because they share the gender of the "dominant" power group at work. However, Irwin (1998) found that workplace prejudice against gay men is *most* likely to happen in traditionally male-dominated work environments.

Revealing personal-domain challenges or difficulties without revealing one's sexual orientation is frequently difficult. References to home life frequently include mentions of significant other, partner, spouse or children and non-work discussions frequently focus on these topics. Through these, colleagues and



managers can draw conclusions as to an employee's sexual orientation. Clair, Beatty and MacLean (2005) cite the example of a female employee who requires time off due to the birth of a child.

*"But she must explain her situation because she is a lesbian and her child is being carried by her partner. Thus, the woman must "out" herself in order to receive standard parental benefits". (Clair, Beatty & MacLean, 2005, p79)*

As a result, where personal life domain issues require a degree of flexibility in the work domain, gay and lesbian employees may find themselves in the unenviable position of trying to maintain secrecy around their own sexual orientation and living arrangements while simultaneously explaining their need for flexibility to their line manager and colleagues.

Clair et al (2005) also point out that the management of information concerning invisible difference in the workplace is shaped by the threat of stigmatisation from colleagues and concurrent concerns about authenticity and legitimacy. That is, gay and lesbian employees have to conceal information about sexual orientation in order to avoid potential negative occupational consequences.

Sexual orientation is a particularly pertinent "invisible difference" when examining work-life balance due to the relevance of the non-work or "home" domain. This involves regard for domestic relationships, living arrangements and childcare responsibilities. Gay and lesbian employees may choose to share information regarding their sexual orientation and domestic arrangements with their employer and colleagues (to "reveal"), to attempt to fit in with a hetero-normative work environment and choose not to correct others' assumptions

about their sexual orientation (or indeed actually attempt deceit in this regard), known as "passing". Alternatively, they may choose to absent themselves from all discussion or reference to personal, home domain topics so that reference to relationships (and inferences regarding sexual orientation) never arise – a subset of "passing", referred to as "discretion" (Woods, 1994).

Decisions as to whether or not to "come out" as gay or lesbian in the workplace are in part made on evaluations of the diversity climate at work (Tsui and Gutek, 1999). Researchers have demonstrated the positive role that supportive colleagues (Ragins and Cornwall, 2001b) and line managers (Day and Schoenrade, 1997) play in helping employees decide to share information regarding their sexual identity. Clair et al (ibid) also point to the role of organisational policy, specifically as to whether policy relating to harassment bullying on the basis of sexual orientation are enforced or not.

Sexual orientation is therefore not simply a matter for the home or non-work environment, as employees' perceptions of safety and career progression hinge on others' acceptance of their sexual identity. Work and home cannot be decoupled in this regard, making sexual orientation a prime demographic of interest for researchers of work-life balance.

### **3. Relationship Status**

As the earlier section on methodological weaknesses in the extant work-life balance literature demonstrated, the overwhelming focus has been on employees in "family" settings – that is, either married or married with

dependant children. Schultheiss (1996) has indicated that the unrepresentative nature of the samples included in much of the research has limited the applicability of its outcomes. Relationship status, and its bearing on the experience of the work-home interface, is a pertinent example. Very little research has specifically examined the differing experiences of married and single employees (Casper et al, 2007).

Some research has focussed on the work-life balance experience of young graduates (e.g. Sturges & Guest, 2004) a group of predominantly unmarried individuals. Sturges and Guest found that concern for work-life balance was a significant issue for young graduates. However, many of these employees may be in stable relationships outside of marriage, clouding the issue of relationship status.

Casper, Weltman and Kwesiga (2007) identify the comparatively unfair position of the single employee, who in their review of the literature, works longer hours, receives less desirable work assignments and receives less attention from managers when experiencing work-related stress. They present a conceptual "singles-friendly culture" at work, which includes elements of social inclusion (e.g. social events suitable for child-free singles as well as married parents), equal work opportunities (e.g. promotions, interesting work assignments), equal access to employee benefits, equal respect for non-work roles and equal work expectations. Casper et al (ibid) compared married and single employees and found evidence for what they termed "family-friendly backlash" in that single employees felt worse off on a number of the organisational culture factors listed above.

As such, relationship status represents an important determinant in how employees interpret the potential for work flexibility and the inherent fairness, or equity, in how they are treated by their employers.

#### **4. Caring Responsibilities**

Employees' caring responsibilities are directly relevant to their experience of the work-home interface. Caring responsibilities (e.g. childcare or care for an older relative), have the potential to impact availability for work, time available for post-work recovery and leisure. Aside from the temporal impact, caring responsibilities seem to negatively impact satisfaction with work-life balance. Eurofound's (2010) data illustrates that parents are much less satisfied with the time they have available for family responsibilities than non-parents, and single parents even less so. Satisfaction with work-life balance also drops progressively with the number of children in the household.

The last 15 years have also seen an increased research focus on the so-called "sandwich generation", members of the "baby boomer" generation who have both childcare and elder care responsibilities (Pierett, 2006). They may have dependant children or indeed grandchildren while also elderly relatives (parents or others) with care needs. This phenomenon is not necessarily a new one – traditionally, elderly parents were cared for by their children in any number of societies across the world. However, as the number of working mothers has increased, so too has the number of mothers who also have care responsibilities for parents.

These employees (both male and female) face dual pressures in terms of care, and arguably, care for older adults tends to become more difficult as they age

and their health declines – in contrast with the more predictable developmental paths of children who tend to become increasingly independent with age. Buffardi, Smith, O'Brien and Erdwins (1999) found that care for older relatives was associated with lower levels of perceived organisational support, lower pay, holiday and satisfaction with work-life balance. Their data indicated that carers of older adults experienced more negative impacts than those with childcare responsibilities. Wolfson et al (1993) found that both sons and daughters felt equal responsibility for provision of care for their elderly parents, highlighting a more equal share of the care-giving workload between the genders than in terms of childcare.

Caring responsibilities of any kind, therefore, have the potential to negatively impact satisfaction with work-life balance and reduce opportunities for flexibility in the scheduling of work and should be considered key demographic variables of interest when examining the home-work interface.

## **5. Locus of Control**

Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966) has consistently been implicated in the experience of occupational stress (Kirkcaldy et al 2002; Hendrix, 1989; Parkes, 1991; Spector, 1987). Kirkcaldy et al (2002) describe the concept (along with Type A behaviour) as:

*"two of the most exhaustively researched personality constructs which appear related to psychosomatic health and work behaviour"* (Kirkcaldy et al, *ibid*, p1361).

As a facet of personality, the concept of locus of control places individuals onto a continuum between an "internal" and "external" orientation. Rotter describes the construct as:

*"Internal versus external control refers to the degree to which persons expect that a reinforcement or an outcome of their behavior is contingent on their own behavior or personal characteristics versus the degree to which persons expect that the reinforcement or outcome is a function of chance, luck, or fate, is under the control of powerful others, or is simply unpredictable."* (Rotter, 1989, p489)

Developing out of Rotter's social learning theory of personality, the construct has since been applied and investigated in numerous contexts. Contextualised within the workplace, employees with an internal locus of control believe they have more control over environmental factors at work than employees with an external locus of control. They believe that events are a direct result of their own actions, whereas those with an external locus of control are more likely to attribute events to external factors such as fate or luck.

Kirkcaldy et al (2002) illustrate the positive impact of an internal locus of control on employees' overall health and wellbeing, satisfaction at work, persistence in dealing with challenges and interpretation of experienced success.

Spector's (1988) conceptualisation of "Work Locus of Control" applies the construct to the workplace and has been shown to be more closely related to important workplace-relevant factors such as job satisfaction and intention to quit, when compared to more general measures of the construct (e.g. Rotter's original measure). Work locus of control represents a context-specific (i.e.

workplace) application of the construct, rather than a competing definition, and as with measures focusing on health-related behaviours and religious belief-related behaviours, the work-based measurement of locus of control does not contradict or compete with earlier formulations.

Despite the popularity of locus of control within the job-related stress literature, it has received very little attention in the work-home interface literature. This is disappointing, as this construct has implications for how employees deal with workload prioritisation, organisational change, and addressing conflicting demands – all factors that can influence an employee's experience of the interface between work and home. As Andreassi and Thompson (2007) point out:

*"It is possible that an employee's dispositional tendency to believe (or not believe) they have control is as important or more important than the actual control available in the work environment."* (Andreassi & Thompson, 2007, p723)

That said, there has been some examination of locus of control with regard to the work-home interface. For example, Noor (2002) found that employees with an internal orientation were less likely to experience "work-to-family conflict". However, this sample consisted solely of married women and the measure used to assess the locus of control construct has been critiqued (by Andreassi and Thompson, *ibid*) for departing significantly from Rotter's original formulation – making the results of this research difficult to generalise. In contrast, Andreassi and Thompson (*ibid*) also examined the role of locus and control and found that

an internal locus of control was negatively related to inter-domain conflict (in either direction).

Despite the methodological weaknesses noted above, due to its impact on employees' interpretation of experienced events and its links to their own behavioural responses (Kircaldy et al, 2002) locus of control remains a construct of relevance for any examination of the work-home interface. Its position as a well-recognised workplace stressor, alongside the work-home interface itself, make it a natural focus for research attention when examining the work-life balance experience from the employee perspective.

## **6. Coping Strategies**

Broadly speaking, coping refers to the cognitive and behavioural responses instigated by employees when faced with situations with the potential to cause strain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Scheck, Kinicki and Davy (1997) posit that stress leads to perceptions of disequilibrium in employees' lives, leading them to engaging in coping responses in order to restore equilibrium. As dissatisfaction with the work-home interface has consistently been identified as a work-related stressor (O'Driscoll, 1996), an examination of employees' coping responses to perceived imbalance is highly relevant.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguish between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. The first of these is characterised by an individual's attempts to reduce elements of emotional distress through the management of feelings and thinking patterns (i.e. cognitive manipulations).



The latter coping strategy refers to an individual's attempts to clearly identify the source of the distress (the problem) and then address this source by elimination or circumventing it.

Research has largely supported the efficacy of problem-focussed coping strategies (e.g. Koeske, Kirk, & Koeske, 1993). However, emotion-focused coping has been demonstrated to be helpful in contexts where the problem faced by the individual is not amenable to change (e.g. Aryee, Luk, Leung and Lo, 1999).

Specifically looking at the work-home interface, Rotondo and Kincaid (2008) found that the efficacy of coping strategies was influenced by the source of the stress (i.e. work-to-home or home-to-work domain conflict). They found that problem-focused coping strategies were best suited to family-to-work interaction contexts. Rotondo, Carlson and Kindcaid (2003) found that avoidance and resignation (types of emotion-focused coping) were associated with higher levels of both work-to-home and home-to-work domain conflict. Application of the coping construct to an examination of the work-home interface highlights the complexity of both the interface and the need for different coping strategies to be deployed depending on the direction of the negative domain interaction. The above research also illustrates the role of an individual's control over their environment (deemed to be higher in the home domain by these researchers) on the relative success of coping strategies. Thus, Rotondo and Kincaid's (2008) findings illustrate that problem-focused coping may well work best in family-to-work domain interaction precisely because individuals have more discretionary control over the home environment and how they organise it than they typically do in the work environment.

In alignment with the theme of examining work-life balance from a diversity perspective at the individual level, it is key to understand how coping strategies are influenced by individual differences and how their deployment in turn impacts perceptions of dissatisfaction and the interface between work and home. Krajewski and Goffin (2005) report that both gender and work context influence the deployment of coping strategies, further highlighting the need to understand how employees may differ in their coping responses to perceived conflict between work and home domains. Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2007) also highlight the role of gender, but also gender role ideology, in employee's success in deploying coping strategies.

*"Therefore, the ability to cope with the stress arising from the simultaneous demands of work and family might, at least partially, be a function of the individual's capabilities."* (Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2007, p1).

Measurement of coping has proved to be a methodological challenge and Somech and Drach-Zahavy (ibid) point to the numerous ways in which coping has been conceptualised in the research literature – with varying levels of detail, using varying measures. Edwards and Baglioni (1999) specifically examined the structure and psychometric properties of two popular measures: the 67-item Ways of Coping Questionnaire (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985) and the Cybernetic Coping Scale (Edwards and Baglioni, 1993) and highlighted the short-comings of the former which included unstable factor structure, items which confound the coping strategies and items with ambiguous content.

In summary, application of existing coping research results onto the work-home interface context illustrate that both direction of inter-domain conflict and demographic factors (e.g. gender) play a role in the efficacy of the coping strategies adopted by an employee.

### **1.2.2 The Organisational Level**

#### **The Relevance of examining Work-life Balance at the Organisational Level**

The negative impacts of work-life imbalance do not simply impact the individual employee. Research has also established the deleterious effects of poor work-life balance at the organisational level. "Work-to-family conflict" has been identified as a cause of decreased job satisfaction (e.g. Rice et al, 1992; Bedeian, Burke & Moffett 1988; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Duxbury, Higgins and Thomas, 1996), and subjective career success (Peluchette, 1993).

Aside from subjective job satisfaction, employees' organisational commitment – a key success metric for organisations concerned with talent retention and driving down the costs associated with unwanted turnover – has been found to increase with work-to-family conflict (e.g. Netemeyer et al, 1996). Specifically addressing employees' intention to exit the organisation, Greenhaus, Collins, Singh and Parasuraman (1997) found that increased work-to-family conflict negatively impacted organisational turnover (i.e. it increased). Job performance can also be negatively impacted by work-to-family conflict (e.g. Frone, Yardley and Markel, 1997).

## **Factors relevant to work-life balance at the organisational level**

A number of factors can impact the experience of the work-home interface at the organisational level:

### **1. Organisational Role**

Perry-Jenkins, Repetti and Crouter (2000) reviewed the work-life balance literature of the preceding decade and found it to exhibit an overwhelming focus on middle-class employees with "professional" roles. This, along with similar critiques from Casper et al (1997) and Ozbilgin et al (2010), points to a form of "one size fits all" narrative that exists, and obscures the disparity in opportunities for true work flexibility that exist between (for example) production and operational environments versus knowledge economy or "professional" work environments. Much of the existing research focuses on "professional" employees who may have divergent pressures, expectations and motivating factors compared to non-managerial or non-professional employees.

### **2. Job Design**

Considering the multitude of organisational factors that differentiate employees in terms of access to flexibility (e.g. decision latitude, location independence, access to mobile communications technology), it is critical that job design is considered alongside other demographic factors in work-life balance research due to their potential for impact on employees' efforts to balance work and home demands.

Job design has been consistently implicated as a stressor in the occupational stress literature (e.g. O'Driscoll and Cooper, 2002), but there are several factors

sitting within this umbrella term with particular relevance to the work-home interface. These include factors that are intrinsic to the role such as shiftwork, physically demanding working conditions (e.g. industrial production environment) or emotionally demanding conditions (e.g. caring or pastoral roles). Fundamentally however, Karasek's (1979) popular demand-control model posits that occupational strain is the result the combined impact of job demands (e.g. workload) and how much decision-making power an employee has in how they carry out their role (decision latitude). Subsequent theorists have further refined the concept of job demands and specified the source of these demands. Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker and Schaufeli (2005) specified quantitative demands (i.e. work overload), emotional job demands (e.g. emotionally stressful situations in the workplace) and mental job demands (e.g. the need for sustained cognitive effort inherent in a job).

Working hours have received a lot of attention in the work-life balance literature. Shiftwork has long been recognised as a risk factor regarding employee health and wellbeing. Shiftworkers run the risk of significant sleep disturbance (Carpentier and Cazamian, 1977), psychological symptoms such as depression (Bohle and Tilley, 1989) and a negative impact on home and social relationships, exacerbated for those on night shifts, whose family and social interactions are severely disrupted (Pheasant, 1991). Aside from shiftwork, long working hours are associated with negative work-to-home domain interaction (While, Hill, McGovern, Mills and Smeaton, 2003). Given the finite time available to any employee in a given week, it is logical to conclude that increased weekly hours spent at work detract from those available for non-work responsibilities or activities.

More generally, Grzywacz and Butler (2005) found jobs with greater decision latitude, task variety and complexity are associated with positive work-to-family domain interaction. Hill, Hawkins, Ferris and Weitzman (2001) found that perceived job flexibility was associated with more positive evaluations of work-life balance. Job autonomy was found to be associated with positive spillover between domains (Thompson and Prottas, 2005). Conversely, While et al (ibid) demonstrated the negative impact of what they termed "high performance management practices" (including performance-related pay) which increase work demands on employees as increasing negative work-to-home domain interaction.

The demands of a given job are therefore of direct relevance to employees' experience of the work-home interface and should be taken into account in holistic examination of this experience.

### **3. Organisational Culture**

Organisational culture – at its most basic, the "how we do things here" of an organisation – has an impact on the experience of the work-home interface of its employees. With specific regard to the interface of work and home, Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness (1999) refer to "work-family culture" and define it as "the shared assumptions, beliefs and values regarding the extent to which an organisation supports and values the integration of employees' work and family lives" (Thompson et al, ibid, p392).

"Family friendly" is a vague and unhelpful term to describe organisational approaches to work-life balance challenges and the weaknesses of the family-centric approach and language have already been discussed.

Thompson, Thomas and Maier (1992) identified four main "family friendly" policies in their sample: alternative work scheduling, dependent care, the provision of parental leave and finally, spouse relocation and job locator programmes.

They argue that flexible work scheduling, representing the most popular of organisational initiatives in their research, does little to change the essential culture of an organisation. Additionally, the first three points illustrate the emphasis placed on time-management solutions (echoing Lewis et al's (2007) distinction between personal control of time and workplace flexibility as outlined in section 1.1.1), rather than any holistic conceptualisation of work-life balance to acknowledge psychological and home-domain issues, as per the ecological systems perspective. They also illustrate the theme running through many "family friendly" solutions, which simply allow employees to spend more time at work. Corporate "concierge" services also fall into this category.

Burke (2006) points out that the gulf between policy and culture exists because espoused policy and actual employee experience may diverge. In other words, stated provision of flexible work arrangements in itself does nothing to alter the overall cultural attitudes to work-life balance in an organisation. For the individual employee, the journey from awareness of policy to actually taking advantage of the policy may be mediated by managerial and colleague support, managerial understanding of the policy and commercial and operational demands at any given time. Organisational attitudes to work-life balance programmes influences participation by employees.

Why then is there a gap between the provision of organisational policies to support employees' work-life balance and uptake of these policies? One perspective on this comes from Thompson et al's (1999) division of work-family culture into its components: Managerial support, Career consequences associated with uptake and Organisational time demands.

They argue that employee uptake of flexible working initiatives or allowances will be impacted by their estimation of the quality of these three factors. If managerial support is found to be wanting (e.g. through stated disregard for the private lives of employees, or indeed modelling of a long hours culture which emphasises "presenteeism" in the office), employees may prefer to focus their balancing efforts on amending the non-work domain of life. Similarly, flexible working initiatives such as paternity leave will remain untapped if male employees perceive uptake to be "held against them" in terms of organisational progression. Finally, if the time demands placed on employees at work negatively impact their private lives, if the culture is one of long hours and sacrifice of personal time, employees will feel less able (or supported) to take advantage of any flexible working arrangements made available.

McDonald, Brown and Bradley (2005) point to two additional reasons for the provision-utilisation gap. Firstly, what they term the gendered nature of policy utilisation, which includes explicit or implicit references to the gender the flexible working policy is aimed at. For example, organisational examples used to illustrate the policy of job-sharing may only include reference to working mothers, thus discouraging male employees from pursuing similar flexible arrangements. This perspective highlights gender as an important variable in the work-home interface, as outlined above.



Secondly, there is co-worker support, in that colleagues can facilitate others' need for flexibility through effective job-share arrangements, or occasional assistance with workload during personal emergencies. Lack of support from colleagues will reduce the likelihood of employees attempting to work flexibly, preferring instead to explore the home domain for solutions to their experience of imbalance.

In summary, mere provision of policy with regard to flexible working and the over-arching work-life balance construct is not sufficient and links to the need for organisations to both monitor uptake and evaluate the impact this has on employees and the organisation as a whole.

### **1.2.3 The National Level**

Recent meta-analyses of the work-life balance research base have pointed to the difficulty in generalising results from the primarily US-centric research base to more diverse international environments (Casper et al 1997, Ozbilgin et al, 2010). As per an ecological systems approach, the national culture should be examined as an additional layer on top of the individual and organisational levels of inquiry, as it has the potential to result in a significant impact on both societal norms with (for example) access to state-sponsored childcare, working hours, access to annual leave and legislation in support of minorities at work.

Rather than attempt to generalise results internationally, the impact of national culture (and working culture) should be factored in to any research, as should relevant intra-national norms (e.g. based on ethnic variance within the same geographical boundary).

## **Factors relevant to work-life balance at the national level**

While it is impossible to identify all of the crucial factors that impact an employee's experience of the work-home interface from country to country, a number of factors have been identified as contributing to national differences.

It is useful to examine the manifestation of work-life balance across Europe to illustrate the diversity of experience among European employees. As outlined above, the vast majority of earlier work-life balance research was conducted in the USA, therefore it is important to identify where there are similarities and differences between work-life balance in the US and Europe. In particular, average length of working week differs significantly between the US and EU (Alesina, Glaeser & Sacerdote, 2005), while legislation guaranteeing the right to flexible working arrangements is now enshrined in European law.

It is also relevant to explore the intra-European differences as norms differ significantly across the continent. Recent research findings from the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS, 2007) and analysis by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2010), illustrate the large variation in experience of work-life balance across the European continent. Member states of the European union (EU), New Member States (NMS12)<sup>1</sup> and EU candidate states (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Croatia and Turkey, jointly referred to as the CC3) differ in a range of respects including: provision of social welfare, attitudes to working mothers,

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<sup>1</sup> The NMS12 grouping within the European Union represents an unofficial description for the following states that become members of the EU between 2004 and 2007: Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

proportion of women in the workforce, size of the public sector, gender-based division of labour in the home, reported average weekly working hours and perceived job security.

All of the above factors play a role in shaping the context for an examination of work-life balance for European employees. Therefore, it is important to avoid generalisations of "European work-life balance", but instead to examine trends across member states and seek to identify the factors that differentiate the climate for positive experience of the interface between work and non-work domains.

Eurofound (2010) found higher rates of female participation in the workforce in Northern Europe (particularly Scandinavia), whereas this is much lower in the south and in the "CC3" states. Thus, the proportion of dual-earner households is much higher in Northern Europe. However, reported "work-life conflict" is higher in the CC3 states, suggesting that other factors, aside from the inherent pressures of a dual-earner household, are involved in employees' calculation of satisfaction with their work-home interface.

Crompton and Lyonette (2006) mirror these findings, and identify significant national differences in satisfaction with work-life balance and highlighted the trend for lower work-life conflict in Nordic states, ascribing this to the welfare model active in these countries. The fact that conflict was higher in France, despite similar state-provided support was put down to the more traditional division of labour in the home compared to Nordic countries.

In summary, national cultures and their resulting social norms and legislative frameworks appear to play a role in employees' experience of the interface

between work and home. This confirms the national context as an appropriate level of inquiry within an ecological systems approach to examining the work-home interface. Put another way, the differences highlighted in the research above indicate that national or cultural differences should not be ignored when researching the interface between work and home.

#### **1.2.4 The Economic Context**

The final perspective on work-life balance within this multi-level approach is the economic context. It is key to consider the impact of the wider economic environment on employees' experience of work-life balance, as work and organisations do not exist in a vacuum and are impacted by the health of the economy. At the time of writing, the recession has had significant impacts on the UK and wider international economy, which should be factored in to any examination of work-life balance.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's report (Equality and Human Rights Commission, Research Report 47, 2009) on the impacts of the current recession include some prescient factors extrapolated from experience of previous recessionary environments. However, the report highlights the fact that the present recession is different to its predecessors for two significant reasons:

Firstly, the simultaneous impact on global economies means that no single economy can provide a level of demand to stimulate the others. This has resulted in a global slowdown and intense uncertainty as to recovery periods.

Secondly, the actions taken by governments to prevent the collapse of the

financial system have had several implications for states' economic planning. Across Europe, governments are introducing 'austerity' budgets that are impacting employees at all levels, in all sectors.

The commission also points to the trend known as 'bumping down', whereby skilled employees take less-skilled positions in order to remain employed. This has a knock-on effect on the employees best suited to these roles.

Naithani (2010) reported the impact of organisational cut-backs in the face of recession and identified a number of factors which could negatively impact the work-life balance of employees. These included: job instability, increase in work intensification and workload, increase in unpaid overtime, expectations of higher employee performance, disruption to career development.

Previous recessions have demonstrated that not all employees are impacted equally and that recessionary environments have implications for the equality agenda.

*"Women with childcare responsibilities were often at a greater disadvantage than either men or other women in continuous employment, due to restricted internal labour markets and employer perceptions of unreliability and inflexibility. Single mothers, older women and those with lower skills and long-standing disability were especially negatively affected, with little support provided by the USA's relatively deregulated labour market."* (Equality and Human Rights Commission, Research Report 47, 2009).

This highlights the need to examine the contemporary economic context when examining work-life balance and employees' perceptions of their own work-home interface.

### **1.3 Aims of the Present Research**

This section of the chapter presents the aims and objectives of this research, placed in the context of the preceding critique of the existing research base and the contemporary socio-economic climate. Mirroring earlier presentation of the impact of work-life balance at multiple levels of experience, a form of the ecological systems approach (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000), this research aims to examine the work-life balance construct at the individual, organisational and wider socio-economic levels.

Table 1.1 sets out the research aims, level of inquiry, research hypotheses and themes addressed.

*Table 1.1 – Alignment of Research Aims, Levels of Inquiry, Research Hypotheses and Themes Addressed*

<b>Aim</b>	<b>Level of Inquiry</b>	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Theme Addressed</b>
1: To investigate the role of demographic factors and individual differences	Individual	1a, 1b	The Role of Demographic Factors
		2a, 2b	Work-Life Balance and Wellbeing
		3a, 3b, 3c, 3d	The Role of Locus of Control
		4a, 4b	The Role of Coping
2: To investigate the role of organisational work-life balance culture and job design	Organisational	5a, 5b, 5c, 5d	The Role of Organisational Culture
		6a, 6b	The Role of Job Design
3: To investigate attitudes to work-life balance in the context of international recession	Economic	7a, 7b	Impact of the recession

### **Aim 1: To investigate the role of demographic factors and individual differences**

Section 1.2.1 illustrated the need to address the diversity of employees when researching work-life balance, to take account of demographic variables such as gender and sexual orientation (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; Ozbilgin et al, 2010). This research was explicitly designed in order to examine demographic factors previously relatively ignored, such as sexual orientation and caring responsibilities for older adults, while consciously moving away from the more

dated conceptualisations of "family" (Schultheiss, 2006). To examine work-life balance at the individual level, the following research hypotheses were generated and grouped into themes as follows: the role of demographic factors, the relationship between work-life balance and wellbeing, the role of the work locus of control construct and the role of coping strategies. Themes and their constituent hypotheses are detailed below.

Aspects of personality such as Locus of Control and their behavioural corollaries (e.g. coping responses) have been largely ignored in the work-life balance research, or as outlined earlier, with unsatisfactory methodological approaches (e.g. Andreassi and Thompson, 2007; Noor, 2002). This research will seek to clarify the role of locus of control in employees' perception of threats to work-life balance, their wellbeing and their responses to them.

### **Theme 1: The Role of Demographic Factors in the Experience of the Work-Home Interface**

**Hypothesis 1a:** Employees will differ in terms of their experience of the work-home interface according to demographic factors, such that parents, female employees, carers for older adults, gay/lesbian employees and single employees will report higher negative domain interaction.

**Hypothesis 1b:** Employees will differ in terms of satisfaction with their own work-life balance according to demographic factors, such that parents, female employees, carers for older adults, gay/lesbian employees and single employees will report lower ratings of work-life balance satisfaction.



## **Theme 2: The Relationship between Work-Life Balance and Wellbeing**

**Hypothesis 2a:** There will be a positive relationship between negative domain interaction and poor wellbeing.

**Hypothesis 2b:** There will be a positive relationship between positive domain interaction and positive wellbeing.

## **Theme 3: The Role of Locus of Control**

**Hypothesis 3a:** There will be a positive relationship between external work locus of control and negative work-to-home interaction.

**Hypothesis 3b:** There will be a positive relationship between internal work locus of control and positive work-to-home interaction.

**Hypothesis 3c:** Work locus of control will moderate the relationship between domain interaction and wellbeing.

**Hypothesis 3d:** Work locus of control will predict the coping strategies adopted by employees.

## **Theme 4: The Role of Coping**

**Hypothesis 4a:** The coping strategies adopted by employees will predict domain interaction.

**Hypothesis 4b:** The coping strategies adopted by employees will predict their wellbeing outcomes.

**Aim 2: To investigate the role of Organisational Work-Life Balance Culture and Job Design**

Section 1.2.2 illustrated the important impact of organisational culture with regard to the experience of the work-home interface for employees (Thompson et al, 1992; McDonald et al, 1994). That is, employees make conscious decisions based on their evaluation of the work-life balance culture of the organisation in which they work. Additionally, they do so with an understanding of the broader culture in which they work, which is built on explicit and implicit messages they receive. It is therefore imperative to account for organisational culture when examining employees' views of their own work-life balance and to combine this with an examination of the various demographic factors that may influence employees' experience and evaluation of the work-life culture and their decisions to ultimately request more flexible working arrangements.

**Theme 5: The Role of Organisational Work-Life Balance Culture**

**Hypothesis 5a:** There will be a negative relationship between positive organisational work-life balance culture and negative domain interaction

**Hypothesis 5b:** There will be a positive relationship between positive organisational work-life balance culture and positive domain interaction

**Hypothesis 5c:** Employees will differ in terms of satisfaction with organisational work-life balance culture according to demographic factors, such that female employees, carers and gay/lesbian employees will report lower satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 5d:** Employees will differ in terms of satisfaction with organisational work-life balance culture according to role design factors, such that those with more demanding roles will report lower satisfaction.

## **Theme 6: The Role of Job Design**

**Hypothesis 6a:** Job design will be related to work-life balance outcomes, such that employees with more demanding jobs will report more negative domain interaction.

**Hypothesis 6b:** Job design will be related to impact satisfaction with work-life balance, such that employees with more demanding roles will express lower satisfaction.

In addition to the specific hypotheses listed above, this research aim was also addressed using qualitative methodology. While the hypotheses above broadly reflect the employees' perspective on work-life balance, the qualitative research project set out to examine the construct of work-life balance from the perspective of those who design and deploy the policies that define the parameters of flexible working arrangements and shape the organisational attitudes to work-life balance: senior organisational stakeholders. The epistemological approach of this research is explored more fully in Chapter 2, but briefly, it represents the application of a social constructionist perspective—an attempt to understand how the construct of work-life balance is built and supported by organisational messages in the broadest sense: rules, regulations, communications and behaviours.

This top-down investigation compliments the traditional bottom-up employee perspective on organisational topics. The results from this investigation are presented in Chapter 4.

**Aim 3: To investigate attitudes to work-life balance in the context of international recession**

The present research initiative has taken place in the midst of an unparalleled global economic crisis. Rather than view work-life balance as an optional "nice to have" experience, something that can be addressed once organisational health is assured and national economies are in recovery, this research is firmly presented in the context of recession in order to understand the impact of the wider socioeconomic milieu on employee and organisational attitudes to work-life balance.

**Hypothesis 7a:** The current economic context has negatively impacted employees' work-life balance

**Hypothesis 7b:** The current economic context means employees will be less likely to explore flexible working options

In addition to the hypotheses listed above, to be examined in the quantitative studies in chapter 3, "Impact of the Recession" is also explored in the qualitative study set out in chapter 4, along with an examination of "Organisational Policy Development and Deployment".

## **1.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the conceptual development of work-life balance in the light of societal changes over the last half-century and has presented the key research evidence and highlighted the methodological shortcomings within this research. The chapter has also highlighted the ecological systems and domain interaction approach as an appropriate theoretical model for examining work-life balance in the contemporary workplace as it exhibits a sensitivity to multiple perspectives, including the individual employee, the organisation and the wider socio-economic context.

Chapter 2 will present the ethos of the mixed methods research approach and discuss its advantages and limitations, before outlining the epistemological orientation of the researcher and aligning the mixed methods approach with the present research.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Introduction**

As this research is explicitly presented as a mixed-methods framework, it is useful to explore the origins of this methodological approach and to set the studies described in later chapters within a coherent methodological and epistemological framework.

This chapter discusses the relatively recent phenomenon of multi-methodological or mixed methods research in the social sciences. Arising from the so-called "paradigm wars" of the 1970s and 80s, a new mixed methods approach to social science research is gaining popularity. However, it should not be viewed as a panacea for the challenges faced by the use of qualitative or quantitative methods – it has inherent weaknesses as well as advantages, and these are discussed below, in the context of the scientist-practitioner model of psychological practice espoused in the United Kingdom.

### **2.2 What is a Mixed Methods approach?**

A mixed methods approach to research represents, in part, a compromise of sorts between the traditional qualitative and quantitative research paradigms that competed for theoretical supremacy for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. At times seemingly diametrically opposed, quantitative and qualitative purists fought for the attention and acknowledgement of their peers and the wider social science audience. These different research camps held different assumptions as to the nature of knowledge itself (ontology) and the means of generating or uncovering this knowledge (epistemology).

The quantitative advocates maintained that research in the social sciences should be as *objective* as possible, to allow their research outcomes to be as *generalisable* as possible. This positivist outlook aped the physical sciences in its emphasis on quantities and measurement of social experiences, using traditional scientific methods to test pre-defined hypotheses and thus add to an incomplete body of knowledge. Their tone could be described as an attempt at formality and the absence of stated values (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) and reflects what is referred to as their positivist stance.

In contrast, the qualitative researcher's constructivist position would be that there are multiple ways to view and interpret our surroundings and thus multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon are possible. In addition, the qualitative approach explicitly draws attention to the human and fallible nature of the researcher and acknowledges that all research is impacted by the values of those that conduct it (Guba, 1990). Whereas the quantitative purist seeks to explain cause and effect, the qualitative purist believes that it is impossible to differentiate fully between the two. In writing, their tone is characterised by rich description with frequent self-reference and reflection.

### **2.3 Defining the Mixed Methods approach**

Attempts to define the mixed methods approach abound, though most have several elements in common, namely the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative methods and the need to combine them in some fashion.

Creswell and Clark (2007) refer to a "research design with philosophical assumptions as well as quantitative and qualitative methods". They argue that

the research area is still "young" and thus it is important to keep an open discussion going regarding definitions. However, their own definition is that it is:

*"Research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry". (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p5)*

This notion of "integration" of findings is possibly the defining characteristic of the mixed methods approach. Tashakkori and Teddie (1998) go so far as to make the distinction between those studies that do integrate findings (to which they refer to as "mixed studies") and those that use mixed methods but do not integrate (which they label "quasi-mixed").

Bryman (2007) draws attention to the tendency of some researchers to integrate qualitative and quantitative results to only a limited degree, or indeed, not at all. Bryman (ibid) emphasizes the need for mixed methods research to be "genuinely integrative" – that is, ensuring that data are interpreted in such a way that the qualitative and quantitative components are "mutually illuminating". He states:

*"The key issue is whether in a mixed methods project, the end product is more than the sum of the individual quantitative and qualitative parts".*  
(Bryman, 2007, p8)

This latter notion points to the potential for synergy that exists by adopting a mixed methods approach, one that is lacking from some of the projects



evaluated by Bryman (2006a) wherein only 18% of the 232 mixed methods journal articles analysed seemed to genuinely integrate the data.

Cresswell and Clark (2007) identify three strategies for combining mixed methods data meaningfully:

*"merging or converging the two datasets by actually bringing them together, connecting the two datasets by having one build on the other, or embedding one dataset within the other so that one type of data provides a supportive role for the other dataset". (Cresswell & Clark, 2007, p7)*

They concur with Bryman (2007) in stating:

*"In short, it is not enough to simply collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative data; they need to be 'mixed' in some way so that together they form a more complete picture of the problem than they do when standing alone." (Cresswell & Clark, 2007, p7)*

Two broad positions have developed among advocates of mixed methods research, dependent on the rationale adopted for conducting such research. Greene and Caracellie (1997) refer to these as positions rather than paradigms, which are philosophically more complex.

Pragmatists (e.g. Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, Reichardt and Rallis, 1994) use "whatever philosophical and/or methodological approach works for the particular research problem under study" (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p.5). So, following a pragmatic position, decisions around research design and the implementation of various research methods are made according to the

demands of the research question. In other words, pragmatists are prepared to adopt a mixed methods approach where this is appropriate for the question at hand, but will only do so when it is felt that doing so will result in more useful data and results.

In contrast, the dialectical position (e.g. Greene and Caracelli, 1997, Maxwell and Loomis, 2003) is characterized by attempts to always mix research paradigms (post-positivist and constructionist) and the resulting synergy from their relative methods. This position makes the assumption that research will always be stronger this way, due to the "fuller understanding of human phenomena" that is gained (Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher and Perez-Prado, 2003). Such researchers will therefore make an *a priori* commitment to mixed methods and explicitly set out to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.

## **2.4 Why conduct Mixed Methods Research?**

Before addressing the specific strengths of a mixed methods approach, it is worth reminding ourselves of the potential weaknesses inherent in research conducted under a single philosophical paradigm, be that positivist or constructionist. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) set some of these out.

Firstly, the hypothesis-testing emphasis of the quantitative approach does not permit the research with any opportunity to generate additional hypotheses within the same study. This represents a form of confirmation bias, in that the researcher may only seek confirmation (or refutation) of the question to which they are seeking answers. This does not permit them to seek out additional questions that may be pertinent to their research aims, or to be aware of phenomena occurring outside of their immediate research focus.

Further, the often categorical approach of quantitative researchers may not match the categories used by the research participants, representing a form of insensitivity to cultural or intra-societal norms and schemas and undermining the validity of the results collected.

Despite generalisability being identified as a strength of the quantitative approach, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (ibid) posit that quantitative data may be "too abstract and general for direct application to specific local situations, contexts and individuals".

Turning to qualitative methods, the above point could be turned on its head to state that qualitative data can often be criticized for not being generalisable enough, with too narrow a focus on a specific context or community.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie also note that the *output* from qualitative research may have lower credibility with consumers of that research (whom they refer to as "administrators and commissioners of programs", but who could more generally be viewed as anyone who consumes or utilizes the output of the research), compared to neat quantitative results. This point will be further expanded upon below, with regard to the scientist-practitioner model of occupational psychology as practiced in the United Kingdom.

A further weakness of the qualitative approach is that it can take significantly longer to complete than quantitative research, involving time-consuming data collection and analysis phases. Relatively speaking, research timeframes or budgets may restrict the opportunities to adopt qualitative methodologies purely due to the time taken to collect and analyse the data.

More fundamentally perhaps, and linked directly to the core philosophy of the qualitative approach, is that the results from such research can be (and often are) influenced by the personal biases and viewpoints of the researcher. While an explicitly qualitative piece of research may come with the accepted caveat of subjectivity and personal input, it does not take away from the fact that this subjectivity may be viewed negatively especially when compared to the comparative objectivity of a quantitative method.

It therefore seems most appropriate to make use of more than one method and apply methods where they make most sense – a form of pragmatism – rather than remain confined within a rigid positivist or constructionist framework. The combination, or integration, of data advocated by Bryman (2007) and Creswell and Clark (2007) and ensuing synergistic result is the main aim of combining methods – to achieve more together than if either qualitative or quantitative method had been adopted and utilised separately.

Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) identify five main purposes for a mixed methods approach:

**Triangulation**, with its roots in the work carried out by Campbell (1957), Campbell and Fiske (1959) and Campbell and Stanley (1963), seeks to identify corroboration and convergence of results obtained for different methods. Campbell and others wanted to assure themselves that results could not be ascribed to the methods used but rather the populations researched.

**Complimentarity** attempts to clarify the results from one method with the results from another. Combining results can bring a level of elaboration and enhancement of meaning that would be absent were a single method utilised.

**Development** is where the results from one method are used to develop the other, which could be in terms of sampling or measurement decisions.

**Initiation** is the seeking out of paradoxes and contradiction, whereby questions arising from one method are recast with the results from the other method.

**Expansion** is where the breadth and range of the research are extended through the use of different methods for different components of the research.

## **2.5 The Merits of Mixed Methods Research**

The overall advantage of the mixed methods approach is reflected in a synergistic combination of data, bringing additional understanding to questions where previously a single, potentially limiting method may have been utilised.

More specifically, narratives and other representations (from qualitative methods) can bring some additional meaning to the numbers collected through quantitative methods. Conversely, quantitative data can add a certain precision to the narratives collected through qualitative research. Considering the intended audience of the research, this additional meaning may help to counter any inbuilt preference for one form of data over another.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue that a mixed methods approach allows the researcher to address broader and more complex research questions in that he/she is not constrained by a single research paradigm, be that qualitative or quantitative. Additionally, the potential weaknesses in one method could be overcome by the strengths of another. Subsequently, mixed methods can provide additional insights into the subject matter at hand, which a single

method approach may overlook. However, any methodology adopted should be judged on how successfully it addresses the research question at hand, more than how neatly it fits with any existing convention (Howe and Eisenhardt, 1990). Howe and Eisenhardt suggest the following standards should be applied:

1. That the methods chosen by researchers provide data which can answer the research question
2. That the background assumptions made by researchers are coherent
3. That the methods applied are done so well enough to obtain credible results.

Bazely (2004) argues for this rather succinctly:

*"As with any research, validity stems more from the appropriateness, thoroughness and effectiveness with which those methods are applied and the care given to thoughtful weighing of the evidence than from the application of a particular set of rules or adherence to an established tradition". (Bazely, 2004, p150)*

## **2.6 Difficulties Associated with the Mixed Methods Approach**

As stated at the outset of this chapter, mixed methods should not be viewed as some sort of methodological panacea. There are a number of inherent difficulties associated with going down the mixed methods path.

The researcher's methodological preferences may mean that one phase takes precedence over the other, regardless of the suitability of the model. Thus, a researcher with a preference for quantitative methods may over-emphasise

their use in a mixed methods study, to the detriment of the qualitative phase and its output. In addition to mere preferences, the core skills of the researcher may mean he or she is unqualified to utilize the methods of another paradigm. The temptation may well be to minimise the contribution of an unfamiliar method to the overall results and avoid any true integration of data – as Bryman (2007) discovered in his analysis, many mixed methods studies fail to sufficiently integrate data.

The concurrent mixed methods designs can be difficult for a single researcher to carry out and may necessitate team-working, which increases the overall cost of the research. Cost is also an issue when the time taken to complete mixed methods research is taken into account. Such projects can take significantly longer to complete owing to the time-consuming and iterative nature of qualitative data analysis.

Finally, the results from each phase may be counterintuitive or even contradictory, necessitating a further iteration of data collection and analysis.

## **2.7 Mixed Methods and the Scientist-Practitioner**

As has been noted above, a mixed methods approach has inherent drawbacks including the time taken and the resulting cost. Considering the researcher as following the Scientist-Practitioner model advocated by the British Psychological Society for its applied psychologist members, the question must be asked: is a mixed methods approach appropriate? To elaborate, will paying organisational clients accept the longer timelines, the additional cost and the difficulty in translating a new form of research results for their internal stakeholders?

It would seem that the positivist (perhaps post-positivist?) philosophy – with its emphasis on measurement and objectivity – is one that is much closer than constructivism to the world of business in which many occupational psychologists earn their living. With this in mind, is it reasonable to expect these psychologists to advocate for a research model that will take longer to provide results, cost the client more and leave them with potentially inscrutable results in the event of methodological phases contradicting each other?

A further issue stems from this, concerning the skill base of most occupational psychologists. Even if we are to strongly advocate for a new emphasis on mixed methods in the realm of occupational psychology, how many practitioners are honestly properly equipped to carry this work out? The postgraduate courses most of these practitioners attended in the last 20 years were characterized by their positivist philosophy, illustrated by the over-emphasis on psychometrics and the measurement of human abilities. Many contemporary practitioners may well be acting outside of their core competencies by implementing a mixed methods approach for their clients, raising some interesting ethical questions.

If mixed methods is to ever become a successful middle-ground between purists from both sides of the philosophical divide, then it must be able to hold its own as an approach and deliver valid results for the end-user. Similarly, those that do adopt a mixed methods approach to investigate issues for their clients must be competent to do so. At present, many practitioners lack the core skills to adequately deliver a synthesis of qualitative and quantitative methods and the resulting synergistic end-product.



As a discipline in the United Kingdom, Occupational Psychology must ensure that its practitioners are suitably trained to pursue this approach, both with regards to the methods used but also in how they communicate the results to a wider audience.

Furthermore, successful implementations of a mixed methods approach should be publicized and identified as methodological best practice for those practitioners interesting in adopting this approach in their work.

## **2.8 Methodological Rationale of the present research**

The following research studies have been coordinated into a mixed methods design comprising:

- 1 – An initial quantitative survey, assessing employee perceptions and experiences of the work-home interface.
- 2 – A subsequent quantitative survey, assessing employees' perceptions of the impact of the recent international economic slowdown on the relative importance of work-life balance
- 3 – A qualitative study comprising interviews with senior organisational stakeholders to ascertain their conceptualisations of work-life balance and how they devise, deploy, communicate and evaluate work-life balance related organisational policies.

Based on the typology presented by Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989), this model can best be described as attempting to achieve **Complimentarity**, by making best use of two sources of data (quantitative and qualitative) to better understand the concept in question.

However, there is also a level of what Greene, Caracelli and Graham (ibid) term **Development**, in that the later qualitative phase was influenced by the results obtained by the previous quantitative phases. Specifically, the semi-structured interview protocol was designed to address the themes emerging from the quantitative results.

Similarly, there is an element of what they refer to as **Expansion**, in that a mixed methods approach was viewed as most appropriate to address some of the weaknesses in the extant work-life balance literature as discussed in the previous chapter, namely the overwhelming emphasis placed on quantitative methods. In addition, this is reflected in a conscious decision to seek the participation of senior organisational stakeholders to act as an additional perspective to that of the wider employee population.

A mixed methods approach was chosen for this research for a number of key reasons.

Most importantly, a mixed methods approach addresses the research questions presented in the previous chapter well on a number of levels. Firstly, it addresses the call for increased use of qualitative methods in work-life balance research (e.g. Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991) and the advantages this perspective brings to understanding employees' experience of the work-home interface.

Secondly, it permits a clear alignment of the research questions against the ecological systems perspective outlined in Chapter 1. Ecological systems theory requires an examination of the phenomena in question from multiple perspectives and multiple levels of experience. The pragmatic mixed methods

approach adopted for this research aligns methods with levels within the ecological system. Quantitative methodology is used to explore group differences in the experience of employees' work-home interface. Qualitative methodology is used to explore how influential organisational stakeholders perceive these group differences when considering employees' work-life balance and how the construct of work-life balance itself is formed and communicated to employees.

Similarly, quantitative methods are used to better understand the micro level (that of self), the meso level (that of family, care responsibilities etc.) and the macro level (the organisational work-life balance culture and the wider economic environment). Qualitative methods are used to understand the influence of the macro-system, in terms of work-life balance culture, work-life balance policies and their deployment as well as how influential players within the macro-system potentially project their own conceptualisations of work-life balance when designing and deploying such policies.

Epistemologically, a pragmatist approach was adopted for this research, combining the positivist orientation of deploying quantitative surveys to measure discrete psychological phenomena alongside a social constructivist perspective in the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews to capture participants' conceptualisations of work-life balance and its influence on the organisation and its employees. This social constructionist perspective lends itself to the research questions at hand, in examining the formulation of rules, messages and behaviours that shape the shared organisational understanding of what "work-life balance" represents. Thematic analysis – a flexible method,

epistemologically speaking – was utilised to elicit the important themes that illustrate how work-life balance is socially constructed in the workplace.

The pragmatic philosophy is evident in the use of survey to capture large volumes of employee data in an efficient way, while using interview methodology with a much smaller number of senior organisational stakeholders, based on their relatively smaller presence in the workforce. The semi-structured nature of the interviews permitted far more iterative exploration of the concepts than a traditional survey.

In summary, the research design adopted for this research was chosen for its flexibility and its alignment with the central theoretical construct underpinning the research itself, that of ecological systems.

## **2.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has set out the rationale for adopting a mixed methods research approach and demonstrated the relevance of mixed methods to the core research questions outlined in Chapter 1. In particular, it has aligned the pragmatic adoption of mixed methods to the ecological systems approach outlined in Chapter 1 and rationalised the design of the studies to be presented in subsequent chapters.

The following chapter presents the results from the quantitative research studies, focusing on employees' experience of the work-home interface and their assessment of the impact of recession on work-life balance.

### **3. Results – Quantitative Studies**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

As described in Chapter 1, there is a need to examine the work-home interface from a more holistic perspective, reflecting the ecological systems model, and to address several of the methodological shortcomings identified in the existing research base. That is, to study the employee experience from a bi-directional perspective – looking at the impact of the work domain on the non-work domain and the impact of the non-work domain on the experience of work. In addition, it is important to understand how these domains can facilitate each other and not pre-suppose work-life conflict. Further, the wider environmental context must be taken in account, including the nature of the role, the culture of the organisation and the wider economic climate. This is reflected in the adoption of an ecological systems perspective.

This quantitative phase of research was divided into two phases of activity:

**Phase 1** comprised a survey designed to address the first two research aims outlined in chapter 1: To investigate the role of demographic factors and individual differences on the experience of the work-home interface and to investigate the role of organisational work-life balance culture and job design. This involved examining employees' experience of the work-home interface while concurrently measuring their appraisal of their organisational work-life balance culture, the demands of their role, their responses to negative domain-interaction outcomes and their generalised orientation to control over their environment. The survey was designed to explore how demographic differences both inside and outside of work (e.g. gender, role seniority, caring

responsibilities) contribute to the experience of the work-home interface. It used a selection of existing measures (outlined in section 3.2) and an online survey methodology using a convenience sample of employees.

**Phase 2** was designed to assess the impact of the current economic recession on employees' perceptions of work-life balance and to address the third research aim: to investigate attitudes to work-life balance in the context of international recession. As this research was launched as the economic downturn began, it was viewed as crucial that this be accounted for in any analysis of employee opinion, as it represents one of the levels of inquiry of an ecological systems approach to assessing work-life balance.

The alignment of hypotheses, levels of inquiry, themes and research phases is represented in table 3.1.

*Table 3.1 – Alignment of Research Aims, Levels of Inquiry, Hypotheses and Themes*

<b>Aim</b>	<b>Level of Inquiry</b>	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Theme Addressed</b>
1: To investigate the role of demographic factors and individual differences	Individual	1a, 1b	The Role of Demographic Factors
		2a, 2b	Work-Life Balance and Wellbeing
		3a, 3b, 3c, 3d	The Role of Work Locus of Control
		4a, 4b	The Role of Coping
2: To investigate the role of organisational work-life balance culture and job design	Organisational	5a, 5b, 5c, 5d	The Role of Organisational Culture
		6a, 6b	The Role of Job Design
3: To investigate attitudes to work-life balance in the context of international recession	Economic	7a, 7b	Impact of the recession

### 3.2 Measures

The two phases of this quantitative research used two different surveys, the contents of which are outlined below. The survey used in Phase 1 was composed of a number of measures. These were brought together into a single online form which respondents completed in a single sitting. The components of the survey were:

**1 - SWING** – (The **S**urvey **W**ork-home Interaction – **NijmeGen**) (Geurts, Taris, Kompier, Dijkers, Van Hoof and Kinnunen, 2005). The SWING is a contemporary, 27-item multi-scale questionnaire designed to collect employees'

experience of the work-home interface. Developed in the Netherlands, the questionnaire examines the potential for domain interaction in both directions – that is, from work-to-home and home-to-work – also measuring whether this interaction is positive or negative.

The version of the questionnaire used in this research was an English translation from the original Dutch, provided by the questionnaire's authors. Its inclusion was based on the need to examine work-life balance in a bi-directional manner and also assess the presence of both positive and negative domain interference. While the questionnaire had previously been developed and deployed in the Netherlands, this was – to this author's knowledge – the first time it had been used in the UK.

The SWING questionnaire calculates an individual's work-life balance in terms of four factors. These factors, example items and scale reliability coefficients are presented below in table 3.2. Respondents indicate the frequency with which they believe the various statements apply to them on a four-point scale: Never, Practically Never, Sometimes and Often.

Its four constituent scales are described in Table 3.2 and each are calculated by the simple addition of scores on each item. Therefore higher scores on a negative scale indicate the presence of more negative inter-domain interaction, while higher scores on a positive scale indicate more positive inter-domain interaction. An overall score for the SWING is not calculated, rather its four scales are used to describe a respondent's experience of inter-domain interactions, in each direction.



*Table 3.2 – Structure, sample items and properties of the SWING Questionnaire*

Scale	Items	Reliability <sup>2</sup> $\alpha$
<b>Negative Work-to-Home Interaction (NWHI)</b> (e.g. You are irritable at home because your work is demanding)	9	.84
<b>Negative Home-to-Work Interaction (NHWI)</b> (e.g. You do not fully enjoy your work because you worry about your home situation)	6	.75
<b>Positive Work-to-Home Interaction (PWHI)</b> (e.g. You come home cheerfully after a successful day at work, positively affecting the atmosphere at home)	6	.75
<b>Positive Home-to-Work Interaction (PHWI)</b> (e.g. You manage your time at work more efficiently because at home you have to do that as well)	6	.81

## 2 – Work-Life Balance Satisfaction (WLB-Sat)

To measure employee satisfaction with their own work-life balance – in contrast to the – SWING, which assesses outcomes from the work-home interface, but not satisfaction – the following single item was developed by the author and added to assess employees' self-rating of their work-life balance:

"Compared to most people, do you think your work-life balance is: Worse than most people, About the same as most people, Better than most people?"

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<sup>2</sup> Reliability coefficients as reported in Geurts et al (2005)

Work-life balance satisfaction was therefore calculated on a scale of 1 to 3, where higher scores indicated higher satisfaction with work-life balance.

**3 - The Cybernetic Coping Scale (CCS)** (Edwards and Baglioni, 1993). This is a 20-item measure of coping responses, identifying five different styles: Changing the situation, Accommodation, Devaluation, Avoidance and Symptom reduction. Its inclusion was based on the theoretical need to assess for demographic differences in coping responses to work-life challenges. Its apparent construct validity and relatively compact structure make it appropriate for inclusion in a multi-measure survey. Table 3.3 presents the scales, numbers of items and reliability coefficients for each:

*Table 3.3 – Structure and Properties of the Cybernetic Coping Scale*

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Reliability <math>\alpha</math></b>
<b>Changing the Situation</b> (e.g. I tried to fix what was wrong with the situation)	4	.90
<b>Accommodation</b> (e.g. I made an effort to change my expectations)	4	.78
<b>Devaluation</b> (e.g. I told myself the problem was unimportant)	4	.95
<b>Avoidance</b> (e.g. I tried to avoid thinking about the problem)	4	.93
<b>Symptom Reduction</b> (e.g. I just tried to relax)	4	.86

Survey respondents were asked to respond to the question "Please indicate the extent to which you have used the following strategies when you were faced with imbalance between your work and home lives" and for each of the possible coping strategies (e.g. "I tried to fix what was wrong with the situation"), indicate whether they "Did not use it at all", "Used it to some extent", or "Used it very much". Scale scores were calculated by simply summing scores for each item with the scale. No overall coping score is calculated for the measure.

#### **4 - A measure of Organisational Work-Life Balance Culture (WLB-Culture)**

(Dijkers, Geurts, Den Dulk, Peper & Kompier, 2007) This 18-item measure assesses colleague, managerial and organisational attitudes to issues relating to the work-home interface (e.g. flexibility of hours, levels of responsibility, personal life issues). This questionnaire was included in the study to measure employees' perceptions of their organisations' work-life balance culture concurrent to their experience of work-home interface outcomes (as measured by the SWING) in order to assess the role of organisational culture. Table 3.4 outlines the measure's constituent scales, items per scale and scale reliability, as reported by Dijkers et al (2007). Respondent agreement is measured on a five-point scale (1=totally disagree, 5=totally agree) and scale scores were calculated by summing item scores.

*Table 3.4 – Structure and Properties of the Measure of Organisational Work-Life Balance Culture*

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Reliability <math>\alpha</math></b>
<b>Organisational Support</b> (e.g. In this organisation it is considered important that, beyond their work, employees have sufficient time left for their private life)	4	.82
<b>Manager Support</b> (e.g. Managers in this organisation are generally considerate towards the private life of employees)	3	.82
<b>Colleague Support</b> (e.g. My colleagues support employees who want to switch to less demanding jobs for private reasons)	4	.76
<b>Career Consequences</b> (e.g. To turn down a promotion for private reasons will harm one's career progress in this organisation)	4	.79
<b>Time Demands</b> (e.g. To get ahead at this organisation, employees are expected to work overtime on a regular basis)	3	.85

**5 - The Dutch Questionnaire on the Experience and Evaluation of Work (VBBA)** (Van Veldhoven, de Jonge, Broersen, Kompier, & Meijman, 2002). The three scales that measure quantitative, emotional and mental demands, comprising 12 items in all, were included in this survey. Inclusion of the questionnaire was based on the need to assess job demands and their impact on experience of the work-home interface. Table 3.5 outlines the scales, example items and scale reliability coefficients. Respondents are presented with a four-point response scale (Never, Sometimes, Often, Always) and scales scores are calculated by summing the item scores.

Table 3.5 – Structure and Properties of the VBBA

Scale	Items	Reliability $\alpha$
<b>Quantitative Job Demands</b> (e.g. Do you have to work very fast?)	4	.88
<b>Emotional Job Demands</b> (e.g. Is your work emotionally demanding?)	4	.86
<b>Mental Job Demands</b> (e.g. Must you be very precise in your work?)	4	.89

**5 - The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12)** (Goldberg, 1972) – The 12-item version of this popular health-related screening questionnaire was included to assess self-reported health as an outcome variable. A likert scoring method was used (0-3) wherein higher scores indicate psychological distress. Therefore this questionnaire was included as a measure of wellbeing to address hypotheses 2a and 2b. Due to the extensive use of the instrument since its development, many differing examples of its reliability could be highlighted. In the recent work-life balance literature, Alphas coefficients of .90 (Hughes & Parkes, 2007), .84 (Edwards, Cockerton & Guppy, 2007), .84 and .90 (Rantanen, Pulkkinen & Kinnunen, 2005) have been reported. In the present study, an alpha coefficient of .90 was established.

An example item from the GHQ-12 is: *"Have you recently lost much sleep over worry?"*. Response scales across this instrument vary in content, based on item content, but all rest on a four-point scale. The response scale for the above item is "Not at all, No more than usual, Rather more than usual, Much more than usual". Overall GHQ-12 scores are calculated by summing scores across all items, taking account of the reverse-scored items (e.g. "Have you been able to

enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?") for which a higher score would indicate better wellbeing.

**6 – The Work Locus of Control Scale (WLCS)** (Spector, 1988) – This 16-item questionnaire assesses individuals' locus of control specifically in a work context and was included as a measure of individual differences to test hypotheses 3a, 3b, 3c and 3d. Half of the WLOC items are designed to assess "internality" and half "externality". An example item from this measure is: *"Promotions are usually a matter of good fortune"* and respondents indicate their agreement to each item on a six-point scale from "Disagree very much" to "Agree very much". High scores on the WLOC indicate an external work locus of control. Spector (1988) reported correlations of between .49 and .57 with Rotter's (1966) original locus of control scale.

The questionnaire has been used extensively since development and reported reliability coefficients, cited by Spector<sup>3</sup>, range from .80 to .85. In the present study, the reliability coefficient for the scale was .85. Spector also reported a mean score "norm" for the UK, based on a sample of 1552 respondents as 41.8. For the present study, the mean score was 42.

**7 – Work-Life Balance Attitudes (WLB-Attitudes)** This measure was used in Phase 2 of the research and was developed by the author to assess employees' attitudes to work-life balance in the context of international

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<sup>3</sup> Reliability data reported on Spector's "Overview of the Work Locus of Control" website: <http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~pspector/scales/wlcsover.html>

recession. Responses were provided on a 5-point likert scale of agreement with the statements offered (e.g. "When considering work-life balance, I am more concerned about my personal life interfering with my work responsibilities"). All items from this measure are outlined in full in section 3.6.

Although used together in a single survey (except for the WLB-Attitudes measure, which was deployed separately), the measures were included to address different hypotheses and research aims. Table 3.6. illustrates the alignment of measures used with the research aims, hypotheses tested and themes addressed in this research. All survey measures can be seen in full in Appendix A.

*Table 3.6 – Alignment of Measures against Research Aims and Themes*

<b>Aim</b>	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Theme Addressed</b>	<b>Measure</b>
1: To investigate the role of demographic factors and individual differences	1a, 1b	The Role of Demographic Factors	SWING, WLB-Satisfaction
	2a, 2b	Work-Life Balance and Wellbeing	SWING, GHQ12
	3a, 3b, 3c, 3d	The Role of Locus of Control	SWING, WLCS, GHQ12
	4a, 4b	The Role of Coping	SWING, CCS, GHQ12
2: To investigate the role of organisational work-life balance culture and job design	5a, 5b, 5c, 5d	The Role of Organisational Culture	SWING, WLB-Culture, WLB-Satisfaction,
	6a, 6b	The Role of Job Design	VVBA, SWING, WLB-Satisfaction
3: To investigate attitudes to work-life balance in the context of international recession	7a, 7b	Impact of the recession	WLB-Attitudes



### **3.3 Methodology – Phase 1**

#### **3.3.1 Ethical Considerations**

Firstly, the design of the research including measures and intended participant groups were approved by the University of East London's ethics committee. Commencement of data collection was delayed until formal approval to begin was received. In addition, the BPS ethical guidelines and new HPC Member Conduct Rules were adhered to with reference to all aspects of the research conducted.

#### **3.3.2 Data Collection**

The data for Phase 1 was collected using online survey methodology, utilising a convenience sample of respondents in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. Initially, permission was sought from a selection of organisations in the UK to distribute the online survey to employees. Organisations were approached on the basis of existing professional relationships with the author. However, permission was denied in every case, and stakeholders cited one or both of the following reasons:

1. The topic was viewed as "too sensitive". Feedback from several senior HR professionals contacted to participate in the study indicated that they did not want their employees to respond to any questions regarding work-life balance at this time as there was a chance this would "raise the expectations" of employees with regard to work-life balance standards and/or opportunities to access flexible working options. In addition, several stakeholders cited the inclusion of demographic survey items addressing sexual orientation as a key

reason for denying organisational access, despite the optional nature of these questions.

2. A number of stakeholders contacted to participate in the study expressed the view that the area of work-life balance was viewed as irrelevant, particularly because of the current recession experienced in the UK. They believed that their employees would be much more concerned with issues such as job security and the survival of their business to worry about their own work-life balance.

As data collection from within a single partner organisation proved impossible, the survey was deployed via a selection of internet social media sites, including: Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>) and LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>). Members of the author's social and professional networks were invited to complete the survey for the purposes of this doctoral research and were invited to contact the author with any questions or concerns they might have. Participants were also offered a summary of the final results once published, by way of recognition of their contribution.

This method of data collection is not new, but not as common in the social sciences as traditional data collection methods. The strengths and drawbacks of such an approach have been well documented over the last decade (e.g. Reips, 2002, Birnbaum, 2004, Skitka and Sargis, 2006). This approach had the benefit of reaching an extremely large audience of potential participants without the need to engage formally with a single host organisation.

Responses to the survey came from a wide range of countries, but only responses from employees based in the United Kingdom and Republic of

Ireland were retained. This was in part due to the fact that responses from outside of these countries were extremely small in number; they had the potential to dilute the results from the United Kingdom (n=167) but were also too few to count as separate groups for comparisons. The responses from the Republic of Ireland (n=31) were retained due to both size of response and the shared language. In addition, both were experiencing a significant recession at the time of data collection, an area of interest for this research project.

### **3.3.3 Participants**

198 completed questionnaires were included for analysis once incomplete responses and responses from outside of the UK and Republic of Ireland had been removed. No items in the online survey were mandatory; as a result, response rates vary to both demographic items and the questionnaires outlined in section 3.2.

The demographic breakdown of respondents was as follows: 104 were male, 93 female; 177 were in full-time employment while 20 were in part-time employment; 150 were in some form of a relationship, 42 were single; 166 were non-parents, 30 were parents; 16 respondents reported caring responsibilities for an older adult; 158 identified as heterosexual, while 35 identified as gay or lesbian; 167 stated their location as United Kingdom, 31 the Republic of Ireland (Note: as this questionnaire was administered via the internet, location of respondents cannot be established in absolute terms); 130 of the respondents reported working in the private sector, 59 in the public sector; 117 reported having managerial responsibility for others in the workplace. Respondents

indicated their age by selecting an age group as follows: 21-29 (n=27), 30-39 (n=57), 40-49 (n=27), 50-59 (n=11), 60+ (n=3)

### **3.4 Results – Phase 1**

The results of the first survey are broken down into the following sections, each addressing one of the research aims set out in section 3.1:

**Research Aim 1:** To investigate the role of demographic factors and individual differences

**Research Aim 2:** To investigate the role of organisational work-life balance culture and job design

#### **3.4.1 The Role of Demographic Factors and Individual Differences**

To investigate the role played by various demographic factors and individual differences in employees' experience of the work-home interface, the following themes were examined, each with specific hypotheses

The Role of Demographic Factors (Hypothesis 1a and 1b)

Work-Life Balance and Wellbeing (Hypotheses 2a and 2b)

The Role of Work Locus of Control (Hypotheses 3a, 3b, 3c and 3d)

The Role of Coping (Hypotheses 4a and 4b)

### 3.4.1.1 The Role of Demographic Factors

**Hypothesis 1a** predicted that employees will differ in terms of their experience of the work-home interface according to demographic factors, such that parents, female employees, carers for older adults, gay/lesbian employees and single employees will report higher negative domain interaction.

Domain interaction was measured using the SWING questionnaire and table 3.7 summarises scores on all four of the SWING scales, illustrating that respondents reported higher rates of negative work-to-home interaction (NWHI) than any other form of domain interaction.

*Table 3.7 – Overall results of SWING measure*

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
NWHI	159	9.00	36.00	22.78	5.94
NHWI	159	6.00	20.00	10.07	3.32
PWHI	157	6.00	24.00	14.98	3.64
PHWI	155	6.00	24.00	14.70	3.66

As the number of items in the SWING scales differs between scales, the following table represents scores expressed as means of means to illustrate comparable differences between the scales:

*Table 3.8 – SWING Scales Expressed as Means of Means*

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
NWHI	159	1	4	2.53	0.66
NHWI	159	1	3.33	1.68	0.55
PWHI	157	1	4	2.50	0.60
PHWI	155	1	4	2.45	0.61

Remaining calculations including the SWING measure were completed using this mean of means representation of the scale scores. This hypothesis was tested by conducting a series of independent sample t-tests with the negative interaction SWING scales (NWHI and NHWI) as test variables and the various demographic factors as grouping variables (i.e. Gender, Parental Status, Caring Responsibilities for an Older Adult, Sexual Orientation and Relationship Status).

None of the expected statistically significant group differences emerged in this analysis, and thus the hypothesis was not supported. Respondents therefore did not tend to differ on their level of inter-domain interaction as a function of any of the demographic factors examined. Tables 3.9 to 3.13 summarise the results of these independent samples t-tests.

*Table 3.9 – Negative Domain Interaction for Males and Females*

	Males (n=84)	Females (n=75)	t	df
NWHI	2.50	2.55	-.481	157
NHWI	1.66	1.69	-.251	157

The above table notes the higher rates of negative work-to-home domain interaction, compared to negative home-to-work interaction, despite the non-significant group differences. This was a trend that emerged in all subsequent analyses. It is also interesting to note the trend for females to score higher on both scales than male respondents.

*Table 3.10 – Negative Domain Interaction for Parents and Non-Parents*

	Parents (n=24)	Non-Parents (n=133)	t	df
NWHI	2.71	2.49	1.49	155
NHWI	1.65	1.69	-.371	155

*Table 3.11 – Negative Domain Interaction for Carers and Non-Carers*

	Carers (n=13)	Non-Carers (n=143)	t	df
NWHI	2.61	2.52	.453	154
NHWI	1.78	1.66	.723	154

*Table 3.12 – Negative Domain Interaction for Heterosexuals and Gays/Lesbians*

	Heterosexuals (n=130)	Gays/Lesbians (n=26)	t	df
NWHI	2.52	2.62	-.723	154
NHWI	1.66	1.71	-.368	153

Again, although the above group differences are not statistically significant, it is interesting to note that the direction of the differences was as predicted, with gay and lesbian respondents (table 3.12) and carers (table 3.11) scoring higher on each of the negative domain interaction scales. And while parents scored higher on negative work-to-home interaction (table 3.10), it was the non-parents in the sample who scored higher on negative home-to-work interaction. This trend was mirrored in the analysis of partnered versus single respondents (table 3.13).



*Table 3.13 – Negative Domain Interaction for Married/Partnered and Singles*

	Married/Partnered (n=124)	Single (n=33)	t	df
NWHI	2.57	2.40	-1.31	155
NHWI	1.67	1.70	.313	156

**Hypothesis 1b** predicted that employees will differ in terms of satisfaction with their own work-life balance, such that parents, female employees, carers for older adults, gay/lesbian employees and single employees will report lower ratings of work-life balance satisfaction. As with Hypothesis 1a, this hypothesis was tested by conducting a series of independent samples t-tests with the work-life balance satisfaction item as test variable and the demographic factors noted above as grouping variables. Overall results on the work-life balance satisfaction measure are detailed below in table 3.14.

*Table 3.14 – Overall Levels of Work-Life Balance Satisfaction*

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Work-Life Balance Satisfaction	161	1	3	2.16	.706

The only significant difference to emerge from these analyses was based on **parental status**. This t-test indicated that parents (M=1.79, SD=.78) rated their work-life balance satisfaction significantly lower than non-parents (M=2.22,

SD=.68),  $t(157) = -2.80$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . This result indicated partial support for Hypothesis 1b.

The relationship between domain interaction and work-life balance satisfaction was then examined. Table 3.15 illustrates the correlations between work-life balance satisfaction and the SWING factors.

*Table 3.15 Correlations between SWING scales and WLB Satisfaction*

	(NWHI)	(NHWI)	(PWHI)	(PHWI)	(WLB-S)
(1) Negative Work-to-Home Interaction (NWHI)	1.00				
(2) Negative Home-to-Work Interaction (NHWI)	.37**	1.00			
(3) Positive Work-to-Home Interaction (PWHI)	-.12	.10	1.00		
(4) Positive Home-to-Work Interaction (PHWI)	-.10	.10	.62**	1.00	
(5) WLB Satisfaction (WLB-S)	-.49**	-.03	.25**	.19**	1.00

\*\* $p < .001$

The above table illustrates the correlations between domain interaction (as measured by the SWING) and work-life balance satisfaction, indicating that work-life balance satisfaction is a relatively good proxy for the SWING when measuring positive domain interaction, and less so when measuring negative domain interaction owing to the lack of significant association between it and Negative Home-to-Work interaction. Nevertheless, none of the above

correlation coefficients are extremely strong, illustrating that while there is certainly some apparent overlap between work-life balance satisfaction and domain interaction (particularly negative work-to-home interaction), the measures are tapping into different constructs: general satisfaction and domain interaction outcomes.

Based on these correlation coefficients, it was viewed as important to examine the relationship between the SWING scales and the work-life balance satisfaction measure in more detail, in order to establish which aspects of domain interaction best predict work-life balance satisfaction.

In order to understand the role of the four SWING scales in employees' estimation of work-life balance satisfaction, a stepwise regression was conducted, with work-life balance satisfaction as the dependent variable and the four constituent scales of the SWING measure as independent variables. The results of this analysis are summarised in table 3.16.

*Table 3.16 Results of Stepwise Regression of WLB item onto SWING scales*

		<b><i>b</i></b>	<b><i>SE b</i></b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>
Step 1	Constant	3.45	.20	
	NWHI	-.06	.01	-.49**
Step 2	Constant	2.86	.30	
	NWHI	-.05	.01	-.46**
	PWHI	.04	.01	.19**

Note:  $R^2 = .24$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .04$  For Step 2. \*= $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .001$

This analysis indicated that the negative work-to-home interaction accounts for the majority of variance (24%) in work-life balance satisfaction in this model, as indicated by the r-squared value of .24 for step one of the regression. A minimal additional amount of variance (4%) is explained by the addition of positive work-to-home interaction into the regression. This would seem to indicate that employees primarily consider the amount of negative work-to-home domain interaction when evaluating their own work-life balance satisfaction. However, it is important to note that these results also indicate that the majority of variance is explained by other variables.

#### **3.4.1.2 Work-Life Balance and Wellbeing**

The examination of the influence of work-life balance on wellbeing involved testing two hypotheses, 2a and 2b. Hypothesis 2a stated that "there will be a positive relationship between negative domain interaction and poor wellbeing", whereas hypothesis 2b stated that "there will be a positive relationship between positive domain interaction and positive wellbeing". It is important to note that these two hypotheses are not simply statements of the same relationships in reverse, as the negative and positive domain interaction scales represent different constructs.

In other words, evidence of a relationship between negative domain interaction and poor wellbeing does not automatically indicate a relationship between positive domain interaction and positive wellbeing. Overall scores on the GHQ12 measure are illustrated in table 3.17.

*Table 3.17 – Overall scores on the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12)*

	N	Min	Max.	M	SD
GHQ	135	2.00	32.00	13.44	6.51

**Hypothesis 2a: There will be a positive relationship between negative domain interaction and poor wellbeing.** To test hypothesis 2a, the negative domain interaction scales of the SWING (NWHI and NHWI) were correlated with the GHQ12 (a measure of wellbeing) to test for a relationship. This analysis indicated that both scales correlated significantly with the GHQ measure, indicating a positive relationship between the negative domain interaction and higher scores on the GHQ – that is, poorer wellbeing – supporting the hypothesis. This analysis is summarized in table 3.18.

*Table 3.18 Correlations between Negative SWING Scales and GHQ12*

	(NWHI)	(NHWI)	(GHQ12)
(1) Negative Work-to-Home Interaction (NWHI)	1.00	.37**	
(2) Negative Home-to-Work Interaction (NHWI)	.49**	1.00	
(3) GHQ12	.47**	.49**	1.00

\*\*p<.001

**Hypothesis 2b: There will be a positive relationship between positive domain interaction and positive wellbeing.** To test hypothesis 2b, the positive domain interaction scales of the SWING (PWHI and PHWI) were correlated with the GHQ12 to test for a relationship. This analysis indicated that

neither scales were correlated with the GHQ measure, though the direction of the relationship was negative, unlike the positive relationship highlighted when testing hypothesis 2a. Therefore, hypothesis 2b was not supported.

On a related note, the results from testing hypotheses 2a and 2b indicate that the positive and negative scales of the SWING are tapping into different experiences as opposed to being two ends of the same scale. Positive and negative work-life balance experiences, as measured by the SWING, seem to be orthogonal in nature.

#### **3.4.1.3 The Role of Work Locus of Control**

The role of Work Locus of Control in the experience of work-life balance was explored by testing the following four hypotheses, which relate work locus of control to the experience of work-life balance, personal wellbeing, the relationship between work-life balance and wellbeing and finally, the type of coping behaviours adopted by employees:

**Hypothesis 3a:** There will be a positive relationship between external work locus of control and negative work-to-home interaction.

**Hypothesis 3b:** There will be a positive relationship between internal work locus of control and positive work-to-home interaction.

**Hypothesis 3c:** Work locus of control will moderate the relationship between domain interaction and wellbeing.

**Hypothesis 3d:** Work locus of control will predict the coping strategies adopted

by employees.

Overall results for the work locus of control scale are presented in table 3.19.

*Table 3.19 – Overall results for the Work Locus of Control Scale (WLCS)*

	N	Min	Max.	M	SD
WLCS	159	21.00	82.00	42.04	10.35

**Hypothesis 3a: There will be a positive relationship between external work locus of control and negative work-to-home interaction.**

To test this hypothesis, the Work Locus of Control scale (WLCS) and the negative work-to-home interaction scale of the SWING (NWHI) were correlated. The results of this analysis indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between an external work locus of control orientation and negative work-to-home interaction (NWHI), supporting the hypothesis. In other words, a belief that one lacks control over the work environment (e.g. “Promotions are usually a matter of good fortune”) correlated with higher rates of negative work-to-home interaction.

As a corollary to this, a correlation between the other negative domain interaction scale of the SWING (NHWI) and WLCS was also calculated to see if the relationship between external work locus of control and home-to-work interaction existed. No significant relationship was identified between work locus of control and negative home-to-work interaction and work locus of control. The

results of these analyses are presented in table 3.20.

*Table 3.20 – Correlations between negative SWING scales and Locus of Control*

	(WLCS)	(NWHI)	(NHWI)
(1) Work Locus of Control (WLCS)	1.00		
(2) Negative Work-to-Home Interaction (NWHI)	.26**	1.00	
(3) Negative Home-to-Work Interaction (NHWI)	.06	.37**	1.00

\*\*p<.001

**Hypothesis 3b: There will be a positive relationship between internal work locus of control and positive work-to-home interaction**

To test this hypothesis, the work locus of control scale (WLCS) and positive work-to-home interaction (PWHI) scale of the SWING were correlated. The results of this analysis indicated a statistically significant negative correlation between work locus of control and positive work-to-home interaction (PWHI), indicating that an internal locus of control is associated with positive work-to-home domain interaction, supporting the hypothesis.

As with hypothesis 3a, the relationship between work locus of control and positive home-to-work interference (PHWI) was examined and a correlation between these variables was calculated. This indicated a statistically significant negative correlation between the two, such that an internal work locus of control was also associated with positive home-to-work domain interaction (PHWI). The results of these analyses are presented in table 3.21.



*Table 3.21 – Correlations between positive SWING scales and Work Locus of Control*

	(WLCS)	(PWHI)	(PHWI)
(1) Work Locus of Control (WLCS)	1.00		
(2) Positive Work-to-Home Interaction (PWHI)	-.31**	1.00	
(3) Positive Home-to-Work Interaction (PHWI)	-.22**	.62**	1.00

\*\*p<.001

So, unlike the negative domain interaction scales explored in hypothesis 3a, work locus of control seems to correlate with both of the positive domain interaction scales, albeit moderately.

**Hypothesis 3c: Work locus of control will moderate the relationship between negative work-to-home domain interaction and wellbeing.**

To test this hypothesis, a series of regression analyses was conducted to assess for the moderation effect of work locus of control on the relationship between NWHI and wellbeing, as measured by the GHQ12. The method used to assess for moderation was as set out by Baron and Kenny (1986) and was represented by the following steps:

1 – GHQ was regressed on NWHI, producing a significant regression equation,  $R^2 = .27$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .26$ ,  $F(1,119) = 24.84$ ,  $p < .01$ .

2 – GHQ was regressed on LOC, producing a significant regression equation,  $R^2 = .12$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .11$ ,  $F(1,120) = 16.53$ ,  $p < .01$ .

3 – GHQ was regressed on the product of NWHI and LOC, producing a significant regression equation,  $R^2 = .25$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .25$ ,  $F(1,120) = 41.45$ ,  $p < .01$

According to Baron and Kenny's method, should path 3 (GHQ regressed on NWHI x LOC) be significant, then LOC can be demonstrated to moderate the relationship between NWHI and GHQ. The series of regressions set out above did indeed confirm this hypothesis, such that paths 1, 2 and 3 represented significant relationships, therefore LOC can be said to moderate the relationship between negative work-to-home interference and wellbeing (as measured by the GHQ), supporting hypothesis 3c. Specifically, an externally-oriented locus of control serves to reduce the impact of negative work-to-home interaction on wellbeing, as measured by the GHQ.

#### **Hypothesis 3d: Work Locus of Control will predict Coping Strategies adopted**

Before detailed analyses were undertaken, the coping measure used (Cybernetic Coping Scale) was evaluated in terms of scale reliability. The following coefficients were obtained (all Cronbach's Alpha) as detailed in table 3.22:

*Table 3.22 – Scale Reliability for the Cybernetic Coping Scale*

Scale	$\alpha$
Change	.225
Symptom Reduction	.251
Accommodation	.528
Avoidance	.305
Devaluation	.630

None of the scales reached the commonly accepted level of scale reliability indicated by a coefficient of .70 or higher (Cronbach, 1951). This indicated the measure used had very poor reliability, effectively nullifying its utility in the remaining analyses involving exploration of coping. As such, the remaining hypotheses relating to coping strategies were left unsupported as no further analysis was conducted on this data, based on the measure's scale reliability coefficients.

#### **3.4.1.4 Summary of Research Aim 1**

Having tested the hypotheses aligned with research Aim 1 ("To investigate the role of demographic factors and individual differences"), the following observations can be made. Firstly, none of the expected demographic differences emerged on the negative domain interaction scales of the SWING, indicating that respondents did not differ significantly in their experience of work-home interface outcomes (Hypothesis 1a). Demographic differences did emerge when work-life balance satisfaction was examined (Hypothesis 1b), in

that parents were significantly less satisfied with their work-life balance than non-parents.

Hypotheses 2a was supported indicating the correlation between negative domain interaction (in either direction) and poorer ratings of wellbeing. Hypothesis 2b, which posited a positive relationship between positive domain interaction and wellbeing was not supported. These results indicate that while negative domain interaction is associated with poorer ratings of wellbeing, positive domain interaction does not necessarily impact in the opposite direction and result in higher ratings of wellbeing.

The results of hypothesis-testing for the role of work locus of control indicated that an externally-oriented work locus of control was associated with increased negative work-to-home domain interaction and thus increased negative work-life balance outcomes for those employees with this external orientation (supporting Hypothesis 3a). An externally-oriented work locus of control was not associated with increased negative home-to-work domain interaction, however. Hypothesis 3b was also supported, highlighting the positive relationship between an internally-oriented work locus of control and both positive domain interaction scales. This indicates the positive impact on work-life balance outcomes associated with employees having this internal orientation.

Further, hypothesis 3c was supported, indicating the moderating effect of work locus of control on the relationship between negative work-to-home interaction (NWHI) and wellbeing. This means that an internally-oriented work locus of control can prevent employees who experience negative work-to-home interaction outcomes from experiencing the expected resultant negative impact on their wellbeing. Hypothesis 3d, examining the relationship between work

locus of control and coping was not supported. Due to the psychometric weaknesses of the CCS measure, further exploration of this data was abandoned, leaving the hypotheses relating to the role of coping in the experience of the work-home interface (4a, 4b, 4c and 4d) unsupported.

The next section explores the second aim of this research and focuses on the role of organisational work-life balance culture in employees experience of the work-home interface.

### **3.4.2 The Role of Organisational Work-Life Balance Culture and Job Design**

This second research aim sought to examine the role of organisational work-life balance culture (Hypotheses 5a to 5d) and job design factors (Hypotheses 6a and 6b) on employees' experience of the work-home interface.

#### **3.4.2.1 The Role of Organisational Work-Life Balance Culture**

This was addressed through the testing of four research hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 5a:** There will be a negative relationship between positive organisational work-life balance culture and negative domain interaction.

**Hypothesis 5b:** There will be a positive relationship between positive organisational work-life balance culture and positive domain interaction.

**Hypothesis 5c:** Employees will differ in terms of how they rate different aspects of organisational work-life balance according to demographic factors, such that female employees, carers, gay/lesbian employees and single employees will provide lower ratings.

**Hypothesis 5d:** Employees will differ in terms of how they rate different aspects of organisational work-life balance culture according to role design factors, such that those with more demanding roles will provide lower ratings.

Organisational work-life balance culture was assessed using the measure of Organisational Work-Life Balance Culture (Dikkers et al, 2007). A summary of its descriptive statistics is presented in table 3.23.

*Table 3.23 – Summary of Organisational Work-Life Balance Culture*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	M	SD	$\alpha$
(1) Organisational Support	1.00					3.50	0.80	.83
(2) Colleague Support	.45**	1.00				3.40	0.73	.75
(3) Manager Support	.58**	.69**	1.00			3.24	0.92	.83
(4) Time Demands	.50**	.27**	.35**	1.00		2.70	1.11	.83
(5) Career Consequences	.44**	.37**	.46**	.69**	1.00	2.81	0.90	.84

\*\*p<.001

**Hypothesis 5a: There will be a negative relationship between positive work-life balance organisational culture and negative work-to-home interaction**

This hypothesis was tested by examining the correlations between the supportive scales on the organisational work-life balance culture measure (Organisational Support, Colleague Support and Manager Support) and the

negative work-to-home interaction scale from the SWING. These are summarized in table 3.24.

*Table 3.24 – Correlations between Positive Organisational Work-Life Balance Culture scales and Negative and Positive Work-to-Home Interaction*

	(OrgS)	(ColS)	(MgrS)	(NWHI)	(PWHI)
(1) Organisational Support (OrgS)	1.00				
(2) Colleague Support (ColS)	.45**	1.00			
(3) Manager Support (MgrS)	.58**	.69**	1.00		
(4) NWHI	-.35**	-.19**	-.23**	1.00	
(5) PWHI	.24**	.16*	.23**	-.12	1.00

\*\*p<.001 \*p<.05

The results of this analysis revealed statistically significant negative correlations between the negative work-to-home interaction scale (NWHI) and each of the organisational support scales, supporting hypothesis 5a. This indicates the presence of a positive work-life balance culture in an employee's organisation is associated with reduced negative work-to-home interaction outcomes. Of these correlations, general organisational support exhibited the strongest negative correlation with NWHI. An illustrative item from this scale is "In this organisation, it is considered important that, beyond their work, employees have sufficient time left for their private life". Colleague support had the weakest correlation with NWHI.

**Hypothesis 5b: There will be a positive relationship between positive organisational culture and positive work-to-home domain interaction**

This hypothesis was tested by examining the correlations between the supportive scales on the organisational work-life balance culture measure (Organisational Support, Colleague Support and Manager Support) and the positive work-to-home domain interaction scale from the SWING. Results are presented alongside those for hypothesis 5a in table 3.24.

The results of this analysis revealed statistically significant positive correlations between each of the supportive scales and the PWHI scale from the SWING, supporting hypothesis 5b. As with hypothesis 5a, the strongest correlation was between Organisational Support and PWHI, while the weakest was between Colleague Support and PWHI, indicating that perceptions of general organisational support for work-life balance are more strongly related to positive domain interaction outcomes than perceptions of support from colleagues.

**Hypothesis 5c: Employees will differ in terms of how they rate different aspects of organisational work-life balance according to demographic factors, such that female employees, carers, gay/lesbian employees and single employees will provide lower ratings.**

To test this hypothesis, a series of independent samples t-tests was conducted, using the scales of the Dikkers et al (2004) Work-Life Balance Culture questionnaire as test variables and demographic variables (gender, sexual orientation, caring responsibilities and relationship status) as grouping variables. This revealed the following significant group differences:



Gender: Female respondents scored significantly higher than males on three of the scales, as follows:

1. Time Demands,  $t(190) = -3.00$ ,  $p=.003$ , indicating that female respondents (mean=2.92, SD=1.17) reported more of a need than males (mean=2.50, SD=1.00) to work extended hours, for example, to get ahead in their organisation.
2. Career Consequences,  $t(190) = -3.02$ ,  $p=.003$ , indicating that female respondents (mean=3.00, SD=.886) feel that workplace flexibility will harm their career to a greater extent than it will their male colleagues (mean=2.63, SD=.842).
3. Colleague Support,  $t(190) = -1.99$ ,  $p=.05$ , indicating that the female respondents (mean=3.50, SD= .702) have a significantly more positive view than their male colleagues (mean=3.29, SD=.740) of the support they receive from colleagues in flexible working matters.

Relationship Status: Respondents who reported being single scored significantly higher (mean=3.02, SD=1.16) on the Time Demands scale than their counterparts in relationships (mean=2.57, SD=1.07),  $t(192) = 2.31$ ,  $p=.022$ , indicating they felt more pressure to dedicate longer hours and remain personally available in order to be viewed as successful at work. Single respondents also scored significantly higher on the Career Consequences scale (mean=3.17, SD=.837),  $t(189) = 3.08$ ,  $p=0.002$ , than their colleagues in relationships (mean=2.70, SD=.871) indicating that they fear negative impact on

their career advancement if they take advantage of flexible working, for example.

Parental Status: Non-parents (mean=2.77, SD1.11) scored significantly higher on the Time Demands scale when compared to parents (mean=2.23, SD=1.00),  $t(192) = -2.47$ ,  $p=.015$ , indicating they have a more negative view of the time demands placed on them at work (e.g. the need to put ones job before home life, the need to work long hours to be taken seriously) than parents.

Sexual Orientation: Survey respondents who identified as gay or lesbian scored significantly lower on the Time Demands scale (mean=2.26, SD=1.05), compared to respondents who identified as straight (mean=2.75, SD=1.10),  $t(188) = 2.33$ ,  $p=.020$ . This result indicates that gay and/or lesbian respondents don't feel the need to dedicate significant extra time or personal availability in order to be viewed as successful at work.

These results support hypothesis 5c, highlighting the demographic factors that influence ratings of organisational work-life balance culture.

**Hypothesis 5d: Employees will differ in their ratings of organisational work-life balance culture according to role design factors, such that those with more demanding roles will report lower work-life balance satisfaction.**

To test this hypothesis, a series of independent samples t-test was performed using the scales of the Dikkers et al (2004) Work-Life Balance Culture questionnaire as test variables and role design factors (managerial responsibility, full- or part-time status, industry sector) as grouping variables. This analysis revealed the following significant group differences:

Sector: Respondents based in the Public Sector (mean=3.00, SD=1.15) scored significantly higher on the Time Demands scale than respondents from the Private Sector (mean=2.54, SD=1.06),  $t(186) = 2.63$ ,  $p=.009$ . This indicates that Public Sector employees feel under more pressure to work longer hours in order to get ahead in their respective organisations.

Hours Worked: Part-time respondents (mean=3.70, SD=.719) scored significantly higher on the Colleague Support scale than full-time colleagues (mean=3.34, SD=.730),  $t(190) = -2.05$ ,  $p=.041$  indicating they felt more positive with regard to the levels of support they receive from colleagues in flexible working matters.

These results support hypothesis 5d and illustrate the role that role-design factors have in ratings of organisational work-life balance culture.

**Hypothesis 6a: Job design will be related to work-life balance outcomes, such that employees with more demanding jobs will report more negative domain interaction.**

This hypothesis was tested in two steps. In the first step, the Dutch Questionnaire on the Experience and Evaluation of Work (VBBA), which

examines employees' perceptions of perceived pressures associated with their role, was correlated with the negative domain interaction scales of the SWING.

*Table 3.25 – Correlations between VBBA scales and negative SWING scales*

	NWHI	NHWI	VBBA Pace	VBBA Mental Load
NHWI	.37**			
VBBA Pace	.62**	.23**		
VBBA Mental Load	.43**	.08	.51**	
VBBA Emotional Load	.47**	.24**	.51**	.46**

\*\*p<.001

This analysis shows that the negative work-to-home interaction scale of the SWING (NWHI) correlates positively with each of the VBBA scales, indicating that employees reporting higher pace and amount of work, higher mental load or higher emotional load also reported more negative interaction from the work to the home domain.

Further, the positive significant correlations between the VBBA Pace and Emotional Load scales and the negative home-to-work interaction scale (NHWI) indicate that employees reporting higher pace and amount of work and higher emotional load reported more negative interaction from the home to the work domain.

In the second step of analysis to test this hypothesis, a series of independent t-tests were conducted, with the NWHI scale as test variable and job design variables (Managerial status, full- or part-time status, industry sector) as

grouping variables. These t-tests indicated that those employees with managerial responsibility report more negative work-to-home domain interaction than non-managers  $t(157), 2.19, p < .05$ . No significant differences were found for the t-tests with the other job design variables.

So, while the results of hypothesis 5d did not indicate managers differed from non-managers in terms of how they rated work-life balance, the results of hypothesis 6a indicate that they do indeed differ in terms of the negative outcomes they experience as a result of negative work-to-home domain interaction, with managers reporting higher rates of such negative interaction. This further evidence for the difference between work-life balance satisfaction and domain interaction outcomes is explored more fully in the discussion.

Following these analyses, a stepwise multiple regression was conducted, with the aim of identifying the workplace factors that best predict negative work-to-home domain interaction. Stepwise regression was chosen over standard regression in order to best identify the relative contributions made by the numerous workplace factors from across the measures used. NWHI was chosen as the dependent variable and the following as independent variables:

1. The three scales from the VBBA questionnaire (mental demands, pace demands and emotional demands)
2. The five scales from the Dikkers et al (2004) Work-Life Balance Culture questionnaire (Time Demands, Career Consequences, Organisational Support, Managerial Support, Colleague Support)

The results of this regression are reported in table 3.26. The regression was significant,  $F=93.60, t(154) = 9.68$

*Table 3.26 – Multiple Regression: NWHI, Work-Life Balance Culture and VBBA Scales*

		<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	$\beta$
Step 1	Constant	2.13	2.185	
	VBBA (Pace)	.83	.09	.63**
Step 2	Constant	10.64	3.06	
	VBBA (Pace)	.65	.10	.49**
	Time Demands	-.49	.13	-.28**
Step 3	Constant	9.96	3.02	
	VBBA (Pace)	.51	.11	.39**
	Time Demands	-.51	.13	-.29**
	VBBA (Emotion)	.29	.12	.18*

Note:  $R^2 = .39$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .06$  For Step 2;  $\Delta R^2 = .02$  for Step 3. \*= $p < .05$  \*\*= $p < .001$

This indicates that a combination of needing to work at a fast pace, with emotional demands and in an organisational culture where long hours and personal availability are associated with progression and success, represent the best predictors of NWHI.

However, as table 3.26 illustrates, the VBBA Pace scale (having to work at speed) accounts for the overwhelming percentage of variance in this model, explaining 39% of variance in NWHI at step 1. A second point to note is that the variable added in at step 2 is also a time-related variable – the Time Demands scale refers to the aspect of work-life balance culture whereby employees feel the requirement to work longer hours or overtime in order to progress.

This regression analysis indicates that negative work-to-home interaction is best predicted by workplace factors relating to time-pressure at work and pressure to remain at work.

**Hypothesis 6b: Job design will be related to satisfaction with work-life balance, such that employees with more demanding roles will express lower work-life balance satisfaction.**

Correlation coefficients were computed among the three VBBA scales and work-life balance satisfaction. Table 3.27 illustrates the results of this analysis.

*Table 3.27 – Correlations between VBBA scales and work-life balance satisfaction*

	WLB Satisfaction	VBBA Pace	VBBA Mental Load
VBBA Pace	-.37**		
VBBA Mental Load	-.21**	.51**	
VBBA Emotional Load	-.17*	.51**	.46**

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$

This table reveals that the correlations between VBBA scales and work-life balance satisfaction were all statistically significant and negative in orientation. This indicates that employees reporting higher pace and amount of work, higher mental load or higher emotional load reported lower satisfaction with their work-life balance, supporting hypothesis 6b.

### **3.4.2.3 Summary of Research Aim 2**

The second research aim outlined in chapter one was to investigate the role of organisational work-life balance culture and job design on employees' experience of the work-home interface. The results presented above illustrated the impact that work-life balance culture has on employees' experience of both negative and positive domain interaction outcomes (Hypotheses 5a and 5b). Employees also appear to differ significantly in their ratings of work-life balance culture as a function of demographic variables including gender, parental status and relationship status (Hypothesis 5c) and role design factors (Hypothesis 5d). Job design also seems to predict negative domain interaction (Hypothesis 6a) and work-life balance satisfaction (Hypothesis 6b) with more demanding jobs predicting these outcomes.

The next section examines the experience of the work-home interface at the next level of inquiry, within the context of international recession.

## **3.5 Methodology – Phase 2**

A key consideration of the relative importance of work-life balance is the wider environment in which an employee works, including factors such as job security and the wider economy. As discussed in Chapter 1, this research was conducted in the midst of a global economic downturn, a socio-economic



development that could not be ignored. It was hypothesised that this would impact how employees view their own work-life balance in that the relative personal importance of maintaining a good work-life balance would diminish in the face of larger challenges regarding economic stability and imminent threats to job security.

### **3.5.1 - Data Collection**

Data was collected via an online survey (described in section 3.2) and, as with Phase 1 of the research, a convenience sample of employees across the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland was used. The same social media networks were utilised to propagate the survey as in Phase 1 (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter).

### **3.5.2 – Participants**

There were 163 completed responses to this survey, across the UK and Republic of Ireland. The demographic breakdown of respondents was as follows: 109 were female; 124 worked full-time; 93 were non-parents; 12 had caring responsibilities for an older adult; 98 were located in the UK, 65 in the Republic of Ireland; 93 worked in the public sector; 100 had managerial responsibility; Age: Mean age = 37, SD = 7.57, Minimum = 19, Maximum = 60.

## **3.6 Results – Phase 2**

### **3.6.1 Attitudes to Work-Life Balance in the Context of Recession**

This phase of the research examined two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 7a:** The current economic context has negatively impacted employee's work-life balance

**Hypothesis 7b:** The current economic context means employees will be less likely to explore flexible working options.

Descriptive statistics for the data from this brief survey are outlined in table 3.28.

*Table 3.28 – Descriptive Statistics: Work-life balance in the context of recession*

	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
The recent economic downturn has impacted how I view the importance of work-life balance	192	1	5	3.22	1.11
People in my organisation have lost their jobs due to the recent economic downturn.	192	1	5	3.33	1.38
When considering work-life balance, I am more concerned about my personal life interfering with my work responsibilities	191	1	5	2.48	1.06
Due to the recent economic downturn, work-life balance is now less important to me than job security	192	1	5	2.98	1.15
Employers are responsible for the work-life balance of their employees	192	1	5	3.04	1.06
I have had to sacrifice some element of work-life balance in order to keep my job	180	1	5	2.83	1.18
The current economic downturn means I am less likely to ask my manager about flexible working options (e.g. working from home, four-day week etc)	180	1	5	2.78	1.15
I believe that achieving a good work-life balance is the responsibility of employees	180	1	5	3.68	.850
When considering work-life balance, I am more concerned about work interfering with responsibilities in my personal life	180	1	5	3.53	1.03
I believe that as the economic situation improves, I will be able to improve my work-life balance	179	1	5	3.23	.941

**Hypothesis 7a: The current economic context has negatively impacted employee's work-life balance**

The results of this survey indicated that 51% of respondents believe the recession has impacted how they view the importance of work-life balance. 47% indicated that work-life balance is now less important to them than job security. 39% reported having to sacrifice some element of work-life balance in order to keep their job. From the perspective of potential domain interaction, the majority of respondents reported more worry about the work domain impacting their home life – only 23% of respondents agreed that *"When considering work-life balance, I am more concerned about my personal life interfering with my work responsibilities"*. In order to explore the impact of recession in more detail, an additional item in the survey asked whether colleagues in their organisation had "lost their jobs as a result of the recent economic downturn". A series of independent samples t-tests were performed using this binary (yes/no) variable as the grouping variable, revealing the following significant group differences:

Respondents who believe colleagues have lost their jobs due to the recession (56% of the sample) were significantly more likely to report sacrificing some element of their own work-life balance in order to retain their job,  $t(146) = -4.00$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

Interestingly, respondents reporting colleagues' job loss due to the recession were also significantly more likely to believe they will be able to improve their work-life balance as the economic environment improves,  $t(145) = -3.19$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

Finally, this same group were also significantly more likely to believe that employers were responsible for the work-life balance of their employees,  $t(148) = -2.88, p < 0.001$ .

An exploration of demographic differences in responses to the recession revealed the following:

Those with **caring responsibilities** for older adults feel the economic downturn has had more of an impact on their view of the importance of work-life balance than those without caring responsibilities ( $t(161) = 2.11, p < 0.05$ ). In addition, this cohort of carers was significantly less likely to believe that employers are responsible for the work-life balance of their employees than non-carers ( $t(161) = -2.64, p < 0.05$ ).

When examining the data by sector, unsurprisingly those employees based on the **private sector** were significantly more likely to report job losses in their organisation due to the recent economic downturn,  $t(141) = -5.98, p < 0.001$ . They were also significantly more likely to believe that work-life balance was the responsibility of employers,  $t(141) = -1.98, p < 0.05$ . Finally, private sector employees were significantly more likely to believe that they will be able to improve their work-life balance as the economic situation improves,  $t(138) = -2.56, p < 0.05$ .

When examining the responses from an **age** perspective, there was a significant positive correlation between age and the item "I have had to sacrifice some element of work-life balance in order to keep my job",  $r(157) = .045, p < 0.05$ , such that older employees were significantly more likely to express agreement with this item.

Irish respondents were more likely to agree that the recent economic downturn has impacted how they view the importance of work-life balance ( $t(161) = -4.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), they were also more likely to indicate that they believe they will be able to improve their own work-life balance once the economic situation improves ( $t(158) = -2.27$ ,  $p = .024$ ) compared to survey respondents from the UK.

Taken as a whole, these data arguably support Hypothesis 7a, which posits that the economic context has negatively impacted employees' work-life balance.

**Hypothesis 7b: The current economic context means employees will be less likely to explore flexible working options**

The survey indicated that just 34% of respondents reported being less likely to ask their manager about flexible working options. 56% disagreed with this statement, indicating that a majority would be just as likely to explore flexible working options. A series of independent samples t-tests were performed on the item "*The current economic downturn means I am less likely to ask my manager about flexible working options (e.g. working from home, four-day week etc.)*" with the various demographic variables outlined above acting as grouping variables. No significant differences emerged from these tests, indicating that, as well as a minority of respondents indicating their agreement with the item, no statistically significant group differences emerged. Hypothesis 7b was therefore not supported.

### **3.7 Discussion**

The above analyses present a complex picture of employees' experiences of the contemporary work-home interface. Not only do employees appear to differ in perception and experience of the work-home interface according to their gender, but also in terms of their status as a parent, their relationship status, their role and aspects of their personality (as inferred by work locus of control).

The fact that significant relationships were highlighted at several levels of investigation (individual, organisational and national/economic) illustrates the benefits of examining the interface between work and home domains from an ecological systems perspective (Grzywacz & Marks 2000). Put another way, any single investigation at one of these levels would miss out on the richness of data from the others, potentially presenting an incomplete picture of the work-life balance experience.

In addition to a review of what can be learnt about the nature of the work-life balance construct, the following sections present a further interpretation of this data, mirroring the levels of analysis presented above.

#### **3.7.1 The Nature of Work-Life Balance**

The results from the Phase 1 survey support the theoretical position that work-life balance as a construct has separate components and further, the patterns that have emerged illustrate the importance of taking a bi-directional view of the phenomenon (Guerts et al, 2005), as well as examining the potential for positive interaction between the work and non-work domains. The SWING questionnaire

demonstrated its utility in assessing work-life balance from multiple perspectives and underlines the need to consider domain interaction and not start from an assumptive position of domain conflict. That said, the data indicate that work-to-home domain interaction best predicts employee satisfaction with work-life balance, reflecting perhaps the increased sensitivity employees have to negative overspill from work to home.

Further, the data illustrated that interaction between domains (both positive and negative) represent different constructs, as opposed to extreme ends of the same scale. This was illustrated in the relationships between NWHI, NHWI and wellbeing, which were not replicated (conversely) with PWHI and PHWI. In other words, while negative domain interaction is associated with poorer ratings of wellbeing, positive domain interaction does not result in better ratings of wellbeing.

It is important to underline the distinction between work-life balance outcomes (as measured by the SWING) and satisfaction with these outcomes, as well as the potential impact these outcomes have on the individual's wellbeing. These results have demonstrated that simply examining these facets of work-life balance in isolation fails to reveal the entire picture. Hypotheses 1a and 1b produced different results owing to the different focus of each: domain interaction outcomes versus general satisfaction with work-life balance.



### **3.7.2 The Role of Demographic Factors and Individual Differences**

The significant group differences that emerged in satisfaction with work-life balance, such that parents reported lower satisfaction (Hypothesis 1b), perhaps confirms what many employees might intuitively suggest. No other demographic variables at the individual level were associated with stable group differences with regard to either work-life balance outcomes or satisfaction with work-life balance as a whole.

However, by including the role of work locus of control, an additional important component of the work-life balance equation is highlighted. Work locus of control appears to moderate the relationship between NWHI and wellbeing, such that the negative impact of negative work-to-home interaction outcomes on wellbeing are exacerbated by an external locus of control. In other words, having an internal locus of control seems to act as a buffer between the negative manifestations of work-to-home interaction and potential impacts on wellbeing. This has important implications for coaching and developing employees with work-life balance issues and indeed for the development of any diagnostic measures in this area.

The poor performance of the coping measure used (in that it demonstrated very weak scale reliability) highlights the need for further investigation in this area, specifically addressing coping responses to work-life balance challenges and relating coping decisions to relevant aspects of personality.

The data revealed some important theoretical relationships between individual factors relevant to the work-home interface and the following section, examining organisational factors, adds further detail.

### **3.7.3 The Role of Organisational Work-Life Balance Culture and Job Design**

The impact of the workplace on employees was examined at two levels: at the macro level, the organisational attitude towards, and support of, work-life balance and flexibility in work. At the micro level, factors such as job design and supervisory responsibility were examined.

Organisational work-life balance culture emerged as a key factor in understanding employee perceptions of work-life balance. A positive, supporting work-life balance culture has a positive effect on how employees experience the interaction of work and non-work domains (Hypotheses 5a and 5b). The demographic differences (Hypothesis 5c) that emerged from this part of the analysis (e.g. gender differences, parental status differences, sexual orientation differences) emphasise the need for organisations to adopt a diversity-driven approach to providing flexibility in the workplace. A "one size fits all" does not work and does not reflect the varying needs for flexibility apparent in the workforce. It also indicates that a truly inclusive examination of work-life balance within an organisation cannot rely solely on legislative frameworks (e.g. for guidance on provision of flexible working initiatives) but also to canvas opinion from the employees themselves. In summary, group differences highlighted in this phase of the research support the calls from researchers (e.g. Ozbilgin et al, 2010, Moen, 2010) for a diversity-sensitive approach to investigating work-life balance.

The results of the analyses focusing on job design (Hypotheses 6a and 6b) highlighted the role that demanding jobs have in employee wellbeing. All of the

VVBA measures correlated strongly with negative work-life balance interaction (NWHI and NHWI) indicating that demanding roles contribute to a poor work-life experience. The VBBA scales measuring the need for pace and measuring the emotional labour involved in the role also correlated strongly with poorer outcomes on the GHQ questionnaire, indicating a negative impact on perceived wellbeing.

Managers were one group that came out with much higher rates of NWHI from this study. This does not appear counter-intuitive, given their additional responsibilities and workload, especially the emotional labour that comes with people management. However, it is obviously counter-productive to leave managers exposed to poor work-life balance due to factors inherent in their role, rather than investigating how the role can be changed to ameliorate the situation for the role-holders. It may be that, while experiencing a higher rate of NWHI, this population hasn't manifested as many of the negative wellbeing outcomes and so it has not registered as a coherent organisational challenge. Managers in this sample had a much stronger internal locus of control than non-managers, which may have had a buffering effect on their wellbeing. As an aside, their internal locus of control may also help to explain their managerial status in the first place. Regardless, it is not sustainable to have a situation where the management population have a poorer work-life balance and accept this as a given.

### **3.7.4 Work-Life Balance in the Context of International Recession**

It is clear from the results discussed in section 3.6 that the recent economic downturn has had an impact on employees' perceptions of work-life balance. Roughly half of the sample now rate work-life balance as less important to them than job security. The results provide an insight into employees' cognitive and behavioural responses to a recessionary environment. For example, over one-third of respondents indicate that, as a result of the recession, they are now less likely to explore flexible working options with their manager. This reflects Naithani's (2010) suggestion that employees acknowledge the employer's increased "bargaining power" during recession, and perhaps indicates an unwillingness to enter into such negotiations when the organisational focus may be on survival rather than an extension of employee benefits.

The impact of exposure to others' job-loss is also clear in these results; respondents who have ascribed colleagues' redundancy to the recession are more likely to report sacrificing elements of their own work-life balance in order to keep their job. Interestingly, these respondents are more likely to believe that they can improve their work-life balance as the wider economy improves. Conversely, those respondents who had witnessed colleagues' job loss were more likely to believe employers were responsible for their work-life balance.

Interestingly, respondents overwhelmingly believe that it is their own responsibility to manage their work-life balance, which runs contrary to the results outlined above. For those employees working in organisations with an unsupportive work-life balance culture, working in demanding roles, this attribution of self-responsibility could be potentially harmful.

The fact that demographic differences also emerged in this analysis, validates the adoption of an ecological systems perspective, as it demonstrates that employees themselves consider the economic context when reflecting on their own work-home interface but that they also differ in their responses to recession based on demographic factors. For example, older employees are significantly more likely to have sacrificed some element of their own work-life balance as a result of recession.

### **3.7.5 Methodological Issues**

The methodological approach taken in conducting this research has a number of potential weaknesses:

The convenience sample used in these two surveys has many of the drawbacks of any convenience sample. However, the descriptive statistics illustrate the broadly representative nature of the sample, despite being collected via the internet.

A further potential weakness of the data collected using this method is the fact that responses came from employees in a large number of highly diverse organisations. This is in contrast to the more controlled research model whereby one or more chosen organisations participate, which allows the researcher to control for organisational variables. The only organisational information collected in this survey was whether it was based in the public or private sector. However, the inclusion of a measure of organisational work-life balance culture in the questionnaire was designed to counter this.

A related factor to consider is the cross-sectional, largely correlational design of the research, which is a symptom of the above constraints.

The poor scale reliability of the coping measure (CCS) was a decidedly disappointing outcome from this project. Additional research on the role of coping in work-life balance contexts is required, which would support the development of coaching interventions in this area.

The length of the survey deployed in Phase 1 of the quantitative phase may have contributed to the relatively low number of responses and the high rate of incomplete survey responses collected at the outset of the project. Further research in this direction needs to ensure surveys utilised are as parsimonious as possible, to minimize the potential for respondent drop-out.

A number of research variables were delineated into those relevant at the individual and the organisational level of inquiry. However, those organisational factors also impact at the individual level (i.e. role and job design) or are a function of individual interpretation (e.g. organisational work-life balance culture). A further distinction lies between the objective (e.g. level of seniority) and subjective (e.g. perceived support from colleagues) factors at the organisational level. This complicates attempts to distinguish between these levels of inquiry, aligned against an ecological systems theory perspective.

By way of clarification, the way these factors have been identified reflects a distinction between factors inherent to the individual (e.g. gender, caring responsibilities) and those that are a factor of their work domain (e.g. role design, support from others). However, measurement of both levels was

conducted at the level of the individual – that is, the individual's interpretation of both their individual circumstance but also their experience of the workplace.

With regard to the second study within phase 1 of this research, a number of methodological issues should be highlighted. Firstly, in order to more accurately assess the impact of recession on attitudes to work-life balance, a repeated measures research design could have been implemented. This would have provided a valuable "before and during" assessment of employee attitudes and more clearly indicated whether the recession had resulted in attitudinal change.

Secondly, the measure used to assess attitudinal change could be improved to more accurately assess attitudes to work-life balance. The present measure was designed specifically for this study, whereas a pre-existing measure of attitudes to work-life balance may have provided more robust and enlightening results.

Conversely, some other methodological points should be highlighted as strengths of the research. The fact that this research acknowledged the impact of the wider economic environment also increases its utility. The use of innovative measures, specifically designed to measure work-life balance issues (e.g. SWING) adds to the value of data collected. Further, the combination of these measures in order to triangulate the contribution of these different factors moved the investigation away from purely attitudinal research. This theme is examined in more detail in the following chapter, which references the use of staff survey data in the evaluation of work-life balance policy.

### **3.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has highlighted the contribution of work locus of control as a construct that moderates the relationship between negative work-to-home domain interaction outcomes and employee wellbeing. The data have also highlighted the importance of organisational culture and its influence on how the work-home interface is experienced by employees. It is when perceptions of work-life balance culture are examined that additional significant demographic differences emerge.

Organisational culture is, in turn, strongly influenced and shaped by senior stakeholders. This may be through explicit policy-formation and implementation or more subtle demonstrative behaviours which indicate what is expected of the employee population; the "how we do things here" of organisational culture.

The following chapter reports the results from a qualitative study focusing on how organisations develop, deploy and evaluate their work-life balance policies. The study was designed and implemented to examine work-life balance from the perspective of senior HR stakeholders and others responsible for the implementation of organisational policy.



## 4. Results – Qualitative Study

### 4.1 Introduction

In considering the employee perspective of work-life balance – the nature of the work-home interface, the manifestation of inter-domain interference and employees' views of organisational attitudes to flexible working – there is also an obvious value in examining the policy-designer perspective on work-life balance, and in doing so, examining the policy-implementer perspective.

Research has demonstrated the frequent disconnect between organisational Human Resources policy (or rhetoric) and implementation of that policy in reality (Legge, 1995; Cunningham, James & Dibben, 2004). McCarthy et al (2010) point out that

*"the devolution of HR decision-making to line management inevitably means there is greater scope for disparity and inconsistencies between the policy formulated at senior HR level and the actual decisions taken by line managers"* (McCarthy et al, 2010, p159).

It is therefore important to understand what organisations are doing, if anything, to ensure accurate and appropriate implementation of such policy, in an effort to standardise practice where possible.

Organisational policy and processes directly impact employees' experience of the work-home interface and additionally, are largely outside of their control. Regardless of other factors such as personality and relationships outside of the workplace, the organisational policies with regard to provision of flexible working arrangements must be factored into any examination of the work-home

interface. Organisational policy – and more importantly, its interpretation and implementation by stakeholders – can either facilitate employees' attempts at managing demands from the work domain, or place constraints on these efforts.

As noted in the introduction to chapter 1, Casper et al (2007) have critiqued the existing work-life balance literature for focusing on the experience of the individual employee, while ignoring the mechanisms of organisations at the meso- and macro-levels. It is therefore logical to examine how work-life balance policies are developed, implemented and evaluated by the HR professionals working in this space. This chapter outlines a research project that used qualitative methodology to examine this question.

Specifically, this project sought to clarify how senior organisational stakeholders conceptualise work-life balance, how this is related to the codification of policies and regulations regarding work-life balance and how they categorise or otherwise group employees when considering their work-life balance requirements.

## **4.2 Methodology**

### **4.2.1 Participants**

#### **Recruitment of Participants**

Participants for this study were recruited via the author's existing professional network. This included exploiting client contacts to identify suitable interviewees and directly approaching clients to request their participation. Assurances were provided regarding personal and organisational anonymity, such that:

- A) No data would be reported that would facilitate the identification of individual participants, and
- B) No references would be made to their organisation either by name or product/services that would facilitate their identification.
- C) Further, if participants mentioned their organisation or its products or services during the interview, these would be anonymised in the transcripts used for analysis and publication.

A selection of 12 client contacts were initially approached, with a view to securing interviews with at least half of these. Obtaining agreement to participate took considerably longer than anticipated in the majority of cases, though several were able to confirm their inability to participate (due to organisational constraints) immediately. Furthermore, a number of interviews were scheduled with participants only to be cancelled at the last minute – this happened on more than one occasion, complicating the data collection process.

Six interviews were eventually conducted – anonymised profiles of participants are included below. While interviewees had a general understanding that the research was looking at organisational attitudes to work-life balance, no specific interview questions were shared with them in advance of the meeting. This was in an effort to get open and honest participant responses, rather than prepared organisational statements of policy. As interviewees were directly responsible for work-life balance in one capacity or another (see below) it was theorised that they would be able to provide opinion and reflection on all interview questions as these sat within their professional responsibilities and domain knowledge.

## **Participant Profiles**

The following represent brief profiles of the research participants, which in order to preserve anonymity, present only that information which is relevant and illuminating to the analysis at hand. Number of employees is included in parentheses.

1. "S": Male, CEO of small consulting firm headquartered in the UK. (<20)
2. "R": Female, Head of Diversity and Inclusion (UK) at an International Investment Bank. (50,000+)
3. "G": Female, Human Resources Director of a UK company in the Leisure sector. (<100)
4. "M": Female, HR Business Partner with responsibility for Work-Life Balance at a large UK high street retail chain. (Approx. 150,000).
5. "D": Male, Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion at a large Public Sector organisation in the UK. (Approx. 175,000).
6. "A": Female, Senior HR Business Partner at a large Public Sector organisation in the UK. (Approx. 175,000).

### **4.2.2 Procedure**

Participants were all interviewed in their place of work, with the exception of "S", whose interview had to take place in a nearby café due to the open plan nature of his office. Interviews lasted from between 45mins and 1 hour. Interview

length was not pre-determined, but due to the nature of participants' responsibilities, was a function of the time they had available for each meeting.

A semi-structured interview methodology was deployed for this project, which would ensure the core topics were covered in each interview, but also allow for deviations and explorations of new areas for discussion as they arose. A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix B, but the topics covered in the interviews included: A description of the policies in place to provide work-life balance, estimates of employee take-up of flexible working opportunities, specific role-based work-life balance challenges in the organisation, communication of work-life balance policies and evaluation of policy impact.

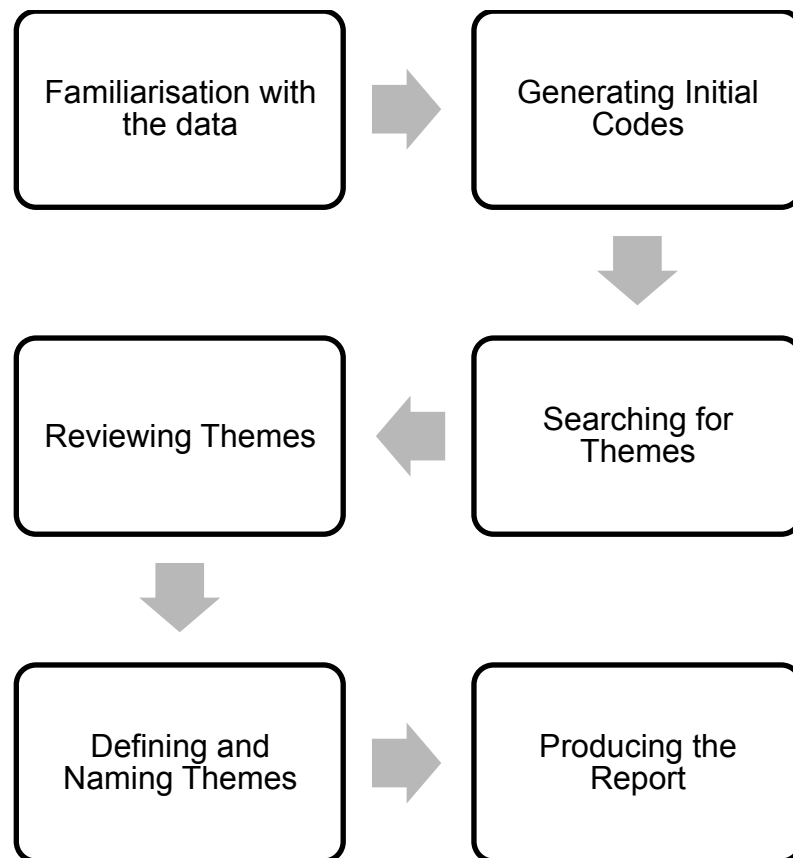
Interviews were recorded digitally, with participants' permission. The need to transcribe interview contents for the purposes of analysis was given as the reason for recording. Participants were also assured that the recordings would not be used for any other purposes outside of this research.

Interview recordings were manually transcribed as soon as possible after each interview was completed. Transcriptions were conducted by the author, as opposed to using external assistance, to help build familiarity with the interview contents. In order to check the accuracy of the interview transcriptions, interviewees were offered the opportunity to inspect their interview transcript; however, none of the interviewees took up this offer.

### 4.2.3 Data Analysis

Data were subjected to thematic analysis. Based on initial literature reviews, this approach was judged by the author as being best suited to this research project – in that it was exploratory in nature – and sits comfortably with the epistemological position of the author.

Braun & Clarke (2006) present an excellent review of thematic analysis, and present an idealised process for this methodology as follows:



*Fig. 4.1 – Process of Thematic Analysis (after Braun & Clarke, 2006)*

Data analysis followed the above model:

**1. Familiarisation with the data:** Interview recordings were manually transcribed (as noted above) in an effort to build familiarity with the content. Each interview was transcribed as soon as possible after the event to ensure accurate transcription. Following transcription, each interview was subject to several readings, during which initial notes were taken relating to content (manifest and latent), to summarise the main views espoused by interviewees. For example, the initial notes identified following re-reading of the interview with "S" were as follows:

1. General negative attitude to organisational policy regarding work-life balance.
2. Emphasises importance of work outputs (results) over inputs (where and when work takes place).
3. There are both moral and economic imperatives for facilitating a positive work-life balance culture.
4. Providing flexibility seems to lead to resourcing pressures, especially given limited people resources available.

**2. Generating Initial Codes:** Following this initial phase of content familiarisation, initial codes were noted against interview output. These were developed as a form of content shorthand, forming the building blocks of higher-

order themes. An example of this is set out below, illustrating the codes relating to the role of technology in employees' experience of work-life balance:

*Table 4.1 – Codes relating to the role of Technology*

Theme	Initial Codes
The role of technology	<p>Blackberrys for managers</p> <p>Laptops for managers</p> <p>Technology assists working from home</p> <p>Technology assists employees in keeping in touch while out of the office</p> <p>Being in touch while away from the desk</p> <p>Using Blackberrys in emergencies</p> <p>Help working from home in emergencies</p> <p>Technology means emails at home</p> <p>Technology leads to (unwelcome) contact out of hours</p> <p>Technology means you <u>have to</u> stay in touch with colleagues</p> <p>Technology means you feel pressure to stay up to date on developments at work</p> <p>Not all employees have access to this technology: technology equals status</p>

**3. Searching for Themes:** This next phase of analysis represented an iterative process of configuring and re-configuring the codes into groups (themes) where content was shared or at least over-lapped significantly. The semi-structured interview used for this project assisted in that most interviews followed a similar course, or at least covered similar territory. In addition, familiarisation with the data at the outset made it easier to link together codes from disparate interview



transcripts. This was initially carried out physically, using post-it notes. Each note represented a single code and these were grouped into piles based on content where a potential theme was emerging. The physical properties and size of post-it notes meant that all codes could be handled concurrently and organised on a single table-top. Once all codes were arranged against a theme, these top-level themes were labelled with a temporary name, and the code/theme arrangements were recorded electronically in the form of lists. This moved the process onto the next stage.

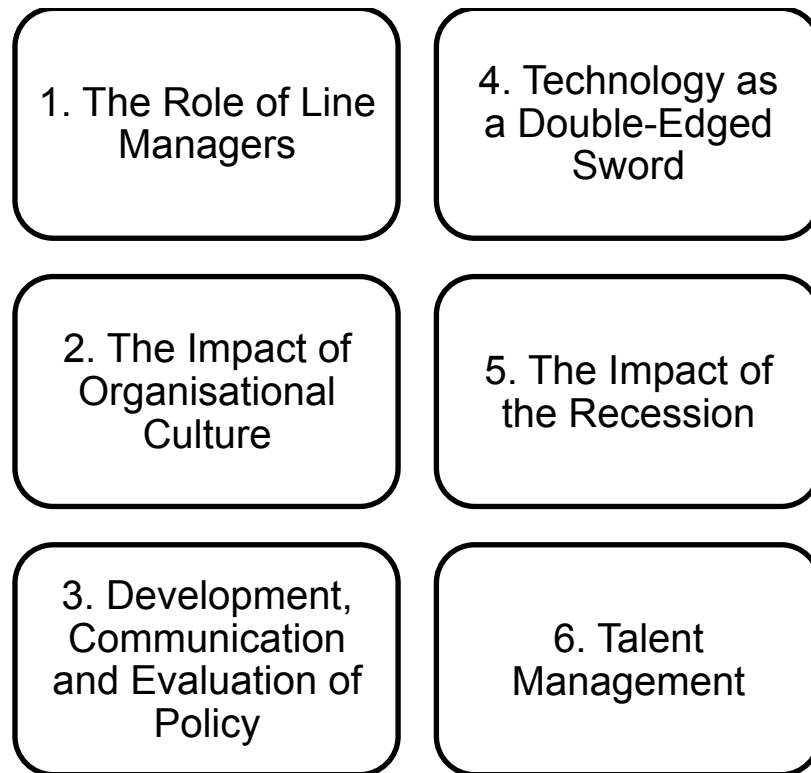
**4. Reviewing Themes:** Outputs at this stage consisted of a single page per theme, on which all codes were noted. These initial themes were examined concurrently to look for overlaps and internal consistency – that is, did all codes under that theme relate strongly to the theme, or would they be better placed elsewhere. Similarly, did the combination of codes represent a single coherent theme, or were there obvious sub-themes present?

This phase of analysis brought to light a number of important sub-themes beneath each of the top-level themes. For example, under the theme initially labelled "Employee groups", closer examination highlighted the need for two sub-themes: one which addressed employees being divided into "professional" and "operations" staff by interviewees and the other the preconceptions interviewees related (or expressed) regarding certain job roles in their organisations. During this phase, in addition to the development of sub-themes, several higher-level themes were subsumed into each other to create fewer and more coherent themes.

**5. Defining and Naming Themes:** This stage of the analysis involved an additional appraisal of the content of each theme and an attempt to provide each with a suitably transparent name and definition. Following the above example then, the original theme "Employee Groups" was renamed "Employee Categorisation". This theme covered interviewees' attempts to cluster and describe employees' experience of work-life balance in terms of categories. This theme in turn clearly divided into two sub-themes: 'The "Professional" versus "Operational" Dichotomy' and 'Role Categorisation'. The former represented the clear theme of interviewees distinguishing between office-based "professional" or "white-collar" employees and those in operational, production or "blue-collar" environments. The second sub-theme was distinct in that it concerned interviewees' references to work-life balance challenges faced by employees due to a specific aspect of their role (e.g. part-time employees) or their demographic status (e.g. gender) or a combination of the two (part-time mothers).

### 4.3 Results

Using the above methodology, the following top-level themes were identified:



*Fig 4.2 – Summary of Final Themes*

The above does not imply a hierarchy or any sort of relative importance of these themes. They are presented as distinct, yet related, with the understanding that manifestation of each can and will influence manifestation of the others. For example, organisational culture with regard to work-life balance and flexible working in general may well impact attitudes to the communication of flexible working policy. Similarly, how line managers interpret and deploy work-life balance policy may impact how their team members utilise technology to obtain work flexibility.

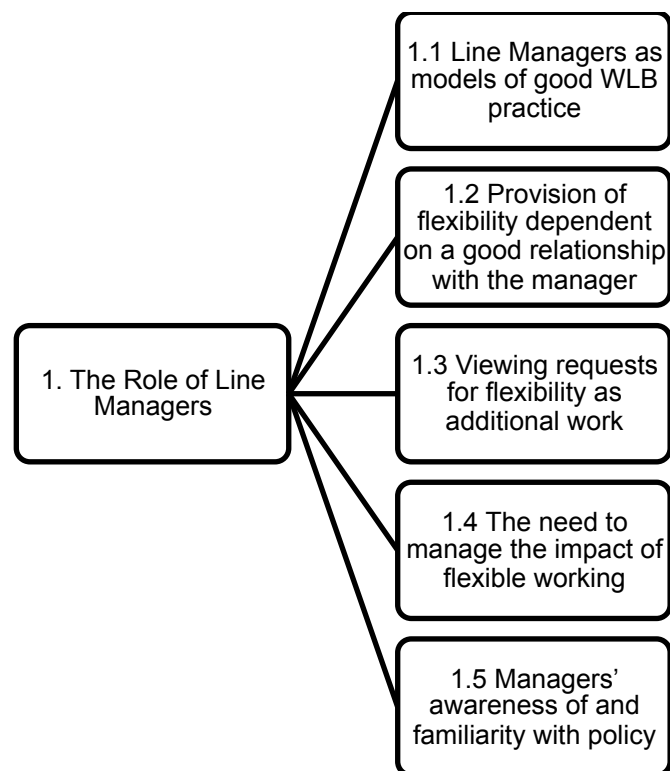
Identification of themes within the framework of thematic analysis sits in contrast with quantitative methods where benchmark data, sample size and statistical method assist in the identification of relationships or concepts. Presenting the above six themes as the most important from this qualitative analysis is founded on a number of factors, including:

The frequency with which they were referred to by interviewees, the cohesiveness or "gestalt" of the theme and the potential for the theme to have direct impact on employees' experience of the work-life interface

The following sections explore each of these themes in depth, outlining their origin, their organisational manifestations, the components of their sub-themes and the illustrative examples from interview transcripts that best relay their meaning.

## Theme 1: The Role of Line Managers

Interviewees consistently highlighted the crucial role line managers play in the interpretation and deployment of organisational Work-Life Balance policy. Unfortunately, references to the role line managers play in this regard were frequently negative or derogatory, and this is conveyed in the sub-themes that emerged through the analysis. The theme is graphically illustrated below, including the multiple sub-themes that constitute the contribution of line managers.



*Fig. 4.3 – Theme 1: The Role of Line Managers*

Managers were identified as the conduit through which policy is relayed from senior organisational stakeholders or HR professionals, but also as the gatekeepers for allowing job flexibility for their direct reports. These references ranged from views of managers as implementers of policy in the larger

organisations, to the description of manager-as-coach in the smaller ones. An example of this supportive type of manager was outlined by "S", the CEO of a small (less than 20 employees) consulting firm;

*"Managers are coaches as far as I'm concerned. Two jobs: to help that individual on their path through life and to help that individual to contribute to the organisation. And those things are sometimes at odds and sometimes together. But you know... if the individual sees themselves as a coach, then definitely it's within their remit to deal with such issues. That's why we have no annual appraisal system, because I say to myself: why? This needs to be ongoing. There's no point in just having the discussion once a year... a box-ticking exercise."* ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)

This contrasts sharply with the experience of "D" in a large nationwide public sector organisation, where managers were overwhelmingly viewed as channels for policy within a larger organisational apparatus that emphasises processes, deadlines and work volumes.

*"So... so I can't.. emm... because we have 8,000 odd managers and they're all quite different and of course one of the challenges within the operations is that a lot of the managers have come up through the operation, they've experienced the toughness of it, the lack of flexibility, so it's hard to relate to something you've never experienced yourself. Also, we're saying to you: you've got all of this to do, you've got [work process], you've got to do it by this time... oh and by the way, you've got*

*to be flexible with your people.*" ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

Here, provision of flexibility is viewed as an additional managerial responsibility, rather than an expected or desirable attitudinal orientation towards provision of employee flexibility. There is also the inference that a level of empathy on the part of the manager is required for effective managerial deployment of this policy, in that if the manager him or herself has not experienced workplace flexibility (with the implication here that they have not) then it is somehow more difficult for them to permit their team members to experience it themselves. This propagates the negative view espoused by critics of work-life balance initiatives, characterised by the "if it was good enough for me" response to demands for flexibility.

In between these two extremes, "M" related her view of the place of managers as implementers of policy, but also the need for them to take ownership and step outside of established practice when they felt it was the right thing.

*"I think the biggest challenge for us as an organisation because we have policies for everything is actually pulling line managers away from that and actually saying now and again, you don't have to follow this line by line, you can actually make your own decision based on what you think is the right thing to do at the time, so... umm... there's a lot that needs to happen with line management to have some coaching around that..."* ("M", HR Business Partner, large high street retailer).

Regardless of how managers' roles in the implementation of policy were regarded by interviewees, their central role in interpretation and implementation became clear as interviews progressed.

### **Sub-theme 1.1 Line Managers as models of good work-life balance practice**

Interviewees noted the need for managers to "walk the talk" concerning work-life balance, specifically referencing their working hours and their own practices of flexible working. Managers were identified as employees who should model good work-life balance behaviour to their direct reports and "M" provided a neat, if somewhat unhealthy appraisal of the role of managers in leading by example, describing her own experiences as a line manager:

*"It was just about putting in place sort of practice where you actually lead by example as a line manager, so you don't work 15 hour days yourself and if you choose to do that, then go home and do it, don't do it in the office, cos then everybody else expects they have to do it. It's just about showing a good example to your team and actually remembering to tell them to go home sometimes cos they're so committed to their work that... you know, they just need reminding that you have a life as well, you know, you need to go and live it." ("M", HR Business Partner in large high street retailer)*

This example communicates a view that if managers cannot authentically live positive work-life values, they should at least appear to do so while in contact with employees in the workplace. It also highlights the important consideration of the manager's own workload in this equation. As noted in the previous



chapter, those with managerial responsibilities experienced greater levels of negative work-to-home interference (NWHI) than non-managers. Managers can therefore be put in the unenviable position of being expected to role-model a set of behaviours that are actually more difficult for them than the employees they manage.

In the organisational context of an investment bank, "R" again highlighted the need for managers to lead by example. In her organisation, characterised by an industry-wide culture of long working hours and office presenteeism, she described her ideal in terms of manager example:

*"Role modelling is essential – and I'm not sure about the working habits of our most senior managers – if they were happy to say and publicise how they work, and how they work flexibly, then that would be brilliant. Even if it's from our CEO, saying that when they last travelled to the US, when they come back they make sure they spend x amount of time with their family and then they log on. Or certain holidays that might have when they make sure they're only looking at their Blackberries once a day or whatever... But when you see your boss sitting there until 10 o'clock every night, then you feel you've got to do the same."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

Her example is telling in that it references a desire to *minimise*, as opposed to *exclude*, checking emails while on holidays. This highlights the very relative nature of what work-life balance is in these different industries. Interviewees felt that employees will be less likely to pursue workplace flexibility to manage their own work-life balance if their manager does not exhibit work-life balance-

friendly behaviours. There is also the implication that this modelling needs to occur among the senior leadership of the organisation to be truly effective.

### **Subtheme 1.2: Provision of flexibility dependent on relationship with line manager**

While the theme of formal versus informal workplace arrangements is addressed below, interviewees consistently related the need for pre-existing positive relationships between managers and direct reports in order for a) managers to feel pre-disposed to grant flexibility or b) for employees to feel empowered to request it in the first place.

*"Emm... I would say it's all relationship-based. Which is unfortunate I think, because it's all about how well you get on with your boss, how well you get on with your team. Whether it's acceptable for you to have some work-life balance." (R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank).*

"D" distinguished between those managers who focus on output as opposed to presence at work – putting the latter in terms of managerial *comfort* of having direct reports physically present in the workplace.

*"If you work for someone who is interested in your output and doesn't really tend to mind how you actually structure your week to actually get there, you can actually have great balance... If you're working for someone who likes that comfort – and I think this can get in the way of work-life balance – of having people physically close to them, that can be*

*very, very different.* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

The role of manager-direct report relationships was also highlighted by "R", who pointed out that this can lead to inconsistencies in experience of workplace flexibility, based as it is on interpersonal relationships.

*"So, I think it's very relationship-based. There's a lot of judgement on people. I think if you get on well with your boss and if you've got the confidence to say 'Actually, I've done my job today and I'm going home' or 'I'm going to be spending an hour in the gym, that's fine I don't need to be sitting at my desk.' Em. Then I think it's a lot easier. But it all comes down to the relationship you have with your boss and team and that's a cultural thing. And so... em...while I think we do support it, you'll probably speak to two different people here: one who will say "Yes, absolutely, I have all the flexibility in the world" and someone who will say "I don't feel that I can ask to do that".* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank).

The most obvious implication of this need for a good working relationship is that this will vary among employees, even within the same team, and potentially contribute to inequality in the granting of flexible working arrangements. This goes beyond managerial ability to interpret flexible working policy and strays into personal preferences, potentially nullifying the intended benefits of the policy. "R"'s quote also highlights the difference between policy existing and employees' comfort in requesting the benefits of that policy.

"D" highlighted a key weakness in any system that relies on interpersonal relationships for success – what happens when one of the parties is replaced? In such cases, this was viewed as a source of problems for the employee, as opposed to the new manager.

*"We have lots of informal arrangements, so lots of things that happen where people strike an arrangement with their line manager, which the organisation doesn't know about. Generally speaking, we're pretty okay with that. The only time that becomes a problem is where the line manager goes, the new person in doesn't like it and we can sometimes get a bit of an issue."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations at public sector organisation)

This points to the temporal nature of the employee's experience of the home-work interface: in addition to the potential for changes in their personal circumstances which may impact the interface, and indeed changes to organisational policy, any change in reporting line may lead to a complete re-negotiation of any informal understanding regarding work flexibility. In a worst-case scenario, an employee may have to start over from scratch and establish their bone fides or discretionary effort before being granted any form of flexibility.

A further point made in interviews was the need to have "credit" as a good performer before being permitted any flexibility at work.

***"R: Is a lot of that accommodation informal?"***

A: Yes...

***R: Between a manager and their direct reports?***

*A: And requires a lot of trust and you have to have... you have to have some leverage, so you need to have a track record of going over and above before you can draw from that and go over your overdraft limit so to speak."* ("A", Senior HR Business Partner, public sector organisation)

This approach to granting informal flexible work arrangements puts those employees whose performance is already suffering due to an existing work-life balance issue at a disadvantage. In other words, their inability to "go the extra mile" in terms of workload or even their continued presence in the workplace, means it will be less likely that they will be considered suitable candidates for any flexible arrangements. Conversely, employees viewed as performing well will be more likely to receive positive responses to requests for flexibility, where in fact they may already have strategies in place to manage the interface between their work and home domains.

### **Sub-theme 1.3: Viewing requests for flexibility as additional work**

Some of the managers described by interviewees viewed the consideration of work-life balance as an additional chore or hassle, on top of their existing workload. Further, granting unplanned or emergency flexibility can be seen as disruptive to their work-plans or shift arrangements.

*"Because from an operational manager's perspective, they tend to think 'well I've got work that needs to be covered from this point to this point, I really could do without the added hassle of having someone that says actually I want to interfere with that... em because gosh that means that I've got to somehow get that covered off. That means introducing someone else into the mix, maybe disrupting their life. I'd rather you didn't ask me, so the answer's no'."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation).

Requests for flexibility in work environments characterised by shift-work arrangements or production quotas were more likely to be seen as disruptive than in "knowledge" work contexts, such as office environments. This obviously relates to the theme concerning categorisation of employees, explored below.

"D" made the illuminating point that such manager attitudes to temporary or ad hoc flexibility may in fact encourage negative behaviours in employees as a direct response. That is, by not permitting them to come in late due to a family crisis for example, the manager may inadvertently encourage the employee to take a day of sick leave. Based on their previous experience with the manager in question, this may in fact be their first option, rather than requesting flexibility.

*"Think about it broader and the behaviours that unwittingly you may drive through not having a reasonable approach to work life balance. And that in itself can provoke interesting insights from colleagues in operations because it's inconvenient if I have this window to cover, it's so much easier if they call in sick... No, I think it would be much simpler if they told*

*me they're sick.*" ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation).

This sub-theme speaks to the fundamental way in which work is organised in such environments, with little or no scope for flexibility and where the absence of one or two team members due to personal emergencies has the potential to cause such disruption that it is discouraged to the point of causing absence of another kind. The wider impacts of this unintended consequence would surely include inaccurate sick leave metrics and the fostering of dishonest sick leave behaviour, which can damage team cohesiveness and employee engagement.

#### **Sub-theme 1.4: The need to manage the impact of flexible working**

Interviewees were cognisant of the fact that workplace flexibility for one employee can have knock-on effects for their manager and their colleagues. This sub-theme includes the efforts managers and organisations as a whole make to ensure that flexibility is kept in check and doesn't cause feelings of injustice or unfairness. Considering the wider team or indeed organisational requirements may mean rejecting appeals for flexibility, either ad hoc or on a more permanent basis. "A" illustrated this point, placing requests for flexibility in the light of the organisation's requirements at that point in time.

*"And the line manager makes the decision and there is a formal process and flowchart that he has or she has got to go through. Emm and it's... every requests is based on its own merits. So you could find yourself where someone before you has requested and their request has been*

*granted, but yours hasn't because it doesn't fit the organisation at that time in that way.*" ("A", Senior HR Business Partner, public sector organisation)

"G" described ongoing communication among and between managers and their teams to ensure a sense of fairness was felt by employees, especially in her organisation where some team members had the opportunity to travel abroad to review locations – something viewed as a perk.

*"Emm... and you know... certain teams here seem to get a lot more social opportunities shall we say. So we brought in a policy that these opportunities you know – you can't just take them ad infinitum – there's a certain number of days you can have per year. And it has to go through a procedure. Because there was a feeling that so and so hasn't been in the office, they're off on jollies. They actually weren't, but that was the perception".* ("G", HR Director at Leisure firm).

This sub-theme therefore references the ongoing, dynamic responses by managers to both employee requests for flexibility and manifestations of employees working flexibly. Mirroring the very nature of work-life balance as a dynamic process, managers' attempts to reconcile employee and organisational need have the potential to cause upset and friction.

In addition, it describes the fact that requests for flexibility may not necessarily coincide with organisational need or ability to grant flexible working arrangements, despite what has gone before. It therefore requires sensitivity on the part of the line manager and an understanding of the impact of flexible working arrangements on the dynamic of the wider team. Employees too must



understand that their need for flexibility does not arise in an organisational vacuum, but in the context of the organisation's capacity to grant flexibility at any given time.

### **Sub-theme 1.5: Managers' awareness and familiarity with policy**

In order to accurately and fairly implement organisational policy regarding work-life balance, managers need to be aware of and understand the relevant policies. Interviewees described their ongoing efforts to keep the management population up to date in this regard:

*"We've also tried to give examples of where a line manager might have to say no. So if you've got other team members on holiday or someone's on sick then its that kind of thing. But throughout the whole organisation, umm we have leadership behaviours and we try to coach our line managers within those sort of behaviours and a lot of it is about being able to make judgements and make decisions about various different things but also about the people that work for you. So.. I'm not saying they're great at it but they're not scared of it because its just part of the organisation." ("M", HR Business Partner in large high street retailer)*

"R" described how, despite trying to up-skill managers in this regard, in many cases, HR still serves as a point of contact for those managers who receive requests for flexibility, thus relying on their expertise to navigate processing and deployment of requests:

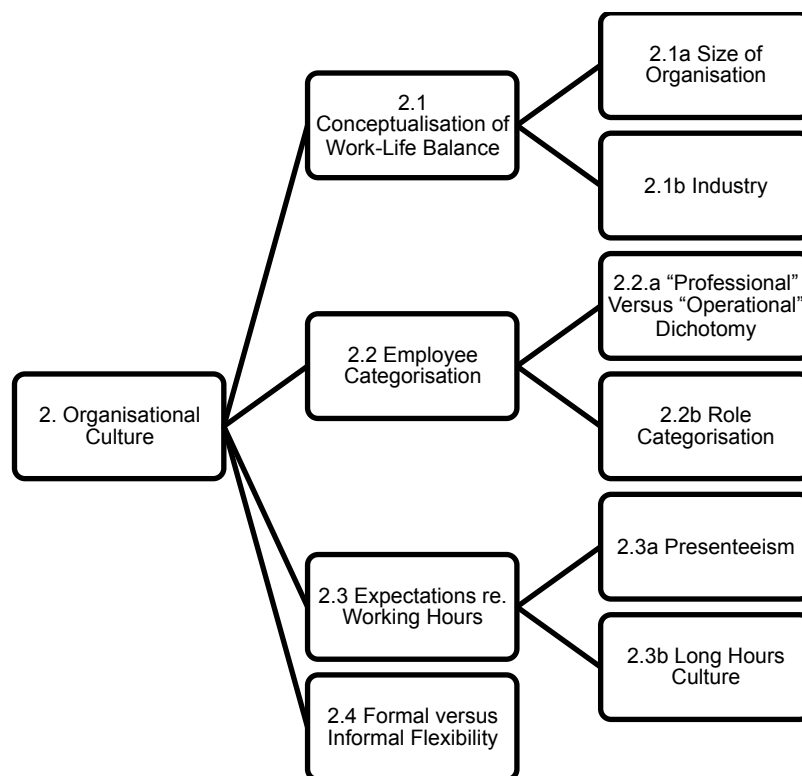
*"... because we are a small organisation compared to other organisations in our industry, line managers here haven't come across how to manage someone who has requested flexible-working arrangements. A lot of line managers are also unaware that there's also legislation around flexible working and some of the things we've been trying to do around that is some inclusion training that we're rolling out across the company, which looks at legislation. So when someone asks for a flexible working arrangement, the line manager will normally come to their HR business partner and they will help them with that request."*

(“R”, Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank).

## Theme 2: The Impact of Organisational Culture

The next theme identified in the analysis of interview transcripts was that of the impact of organisational culture on understanding work-life balance. At it's most fundamental, organisational culture is about "how we do things here", and the organisation's conceptualisation of what work-life balance represents, as well as expectations about how work is carried out, are important factors in how it will be experienced by employees.

The diagram below illustrates this theme and the various sub-themes that emerged from it during analysis.



*Fig 4.4 – Theme 2: Organisational Culture*

### **Sub-theme 2.1: Conceptualisation of Work-Life Balance**

At its core, how the organisation represents and communicates the concept of work-life balance will flavour employees' experience of their work-home interface. Interestingly, interviewees found it somewhat difficult to verbalise their view of what work-life balance actually means in their organisations. "S" provided one of the most concise definitions of the concept:

*"Based on the theoretical knowledge that there is balance to be achieved between input and productivity." ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)*

When probed, he elaborated on his view, outlining what he viewed as the benefits of facilitating flexibility, both for the employee and the organisation:

*"Yeah. My approach has always been one of... it's not about inputs, it's about outputs. Emm.. so I don't want to instil a culture where people feel compelled to work extended hours. And actually where I spot that going on, I will tell people." ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)*

*"I think it's morally right in the first place. You need to define what that balance point is. And that varies between individuals; but I think there's a moralistic point to that, which sits outside of harsh corporate things. But then there's the corporate thing... we're running marathons, we're not running sprints. If we want people there for the duration, then they've got to run at an appropriate base. If they run too fast, then they're going to burn out. We're running a marathon." ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)*

Other interviewees provided similarly high-level descriptions of work-life balance in their own organisations:

*"Well, I come to it from the perspective of it gives people flexibility, it gives them freedom to have more control over their lives."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

*"And actually, in my view, work-life balance does represent an opportunity to get more out of people by getting people to work... or have the opportunity to think about how they want to work more effectively. And I also am a bit of an advocate and believe in... if you give people more autonomy, actually, you'll get more back."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion).

This difficulty interviewees experienced in giving structure to their views of work-life balance and why an organisation should pursue it for employees may well be based in the lack of evidence any of them seemed to have for benefits in their own organisation.

This theme, that of superficial (or absent) evaluation of processes, is explored in detail below. However, a lack of data or evidence for the benefits work-life balance brings to their organisation can in part explain their difficulty in progressing from very high-level explanations and definitions.

Interestingly, discussions of the nature of work-life balance were shaped by the interviewees' focus on policy, rules and regulations. This therefore emphasised the temporal element of the work-home interface (e.g. time pressures, temporal overspill from work to home domain, time management and so on) and

neglected the psychological and higher-order wellbeing aspects of the construct (e.g. emotional overspill between domains). Therefore, as outlined above, the emphasis was firmly on how organisations facilitate flexible working arrangements (or not, as the case may be) through established processes and procedures. This ignores the aspects of work-life balance that include psychological or emotional overspill or interference between domains. It may also betray the process focus of most Human Resources functions.

Two additional factors, here represented as sub-themes, impacted the organisational view of work-life balance: the size of the organisation and the industry in which the organisation operated.

### **Sub-theme 2.1a: Size of Organisation**

The size of the organisation seems also to have been a factor in how interviewees ascribed their success with facilitating work-life balance. "S" intimated that the present situation – characterised by the absence of processes and light touch management among a small team of less than 20 employees – could quite conceivably continue even after the business has grown. Specifically, "S" pointed to the limited resources in a smaller business and how employee flexibility in a smaller team can impact provision of services:

*"I think it's easier in a larger organisation, because you've got more pieces to play around with. In a small organisation, it can become quite difficult. If you've got to have two of a certain kind of person available at all times, and one wants to do these hours and one wants to do those hours..."* ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)

*"It's harder for a small business. Umm... It's harder... we've come across this in customer service recently. In my <<company name>> days, I had 30 consultants. So for "consultant of the day", they'd have to do it once every six weeks. Easy to do. When you've got 5 or seven, it's once a week or once every... it's that bit more difficult, you know? Where else is it more difficult? I think where you've got people... you know, one person with a skill set that isn't replicated elsewhere... if I've got a team of accountants, six or seven accountants, credit control clerks, book-keepers, doing the doing, it's fine. In this business, you just don't. Even the company I out-source it to is small. There's only four of them... two accountants and two book-keepers. If the two accountants are away, I'm snookered."* ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)

Essentially, with fewer "resources" in a smaller organisation, provision of flexibility is more challenging for the manager responsible, and flexible working arrangements are more immediately obvious and potentially impactful on productivity.

### **Sub-theme 2.1b: Industry**

The industry in which the organisation was based also seems to play a part in the culture and attitudes towards work-life balance, as described by interviewees. Specifically, extended reference was made to the long-hours culture espoused in the Investment Banking space, whereas the fast pace of change in the retail sector and ensuing reactive stance was highlighted as a factor.

Rather than evidence-based, these were presented almost as "givens", to be accepted at face value. It is interesting to consider the impact these assumptions about the nature of work in these contrasting industries has on organisational attitudes to work-life balance.

*"So when someone asks for a flexible working arrangement, the line manager will normally come to their HR business partner and they will help them with that request. I think one of the good things about here is that we are... when those requests come up, we will try to find ways of accommodating them, if we can. I don't think maybe that's typical for our industry?"*

("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank).

## **Sub-theme 2.2: Employee Categorisation**

Interviewees consistently used verbal shorthand when referring to employees by group in their organisations. Interestingly, this was not primarily on the basis of demographics (e.g. gender) as might be expected when discussing work-life balance. Instead, the primary distinction when it came to the work-life balance of employees was between those that were labeled "professional" or "white-collar" versus those that were called "operational" or "blue-collar". Subsequent categorization of employees was then based on perceived limitations their job design placed on opportunities for flexible working (e.g. shift-based staff).



### **Sub-theme 2.2a: The "professional" versus "operational" dichotomy**

While this was a consistent categorization of employees, interviewees' interpretation of how group membership impacted quality of work-life balance was not. That is, for some interviewees, the "professional" employees had a worse work-life balance, for others, it was the "operational" employees.

For example, "A", referencing the two groups, believed "operational" employees to have the more difficult time of balancing work and home demands due to the rigid nature of their work. "Professional" employees can take advantage of more flexibility in their roles and adapt more easily to work-life balance challenges as they arise.

*"I think it's a game of two halves, I think our front line... it's very much emm... an industrial environment, so it's very much clock-in and clock-out at your given time and take your break at your specific allocated slots. So very much for the blue-collar workforce, I think it's very much a... rigid existence. For our white-collar management and office type environments, it is much more accommodating and much less clock-watching. And a lot more swings and roundabouts. So if in London in particular if your Tubes are late or on strike, whatever it might be, the time is always made up in either goodwill or caught up here or there."*

("A", Senior HR Business Partner, Public Sector organisation)

However, almost turning this on its head, "M" explained the relative rigidity of "blue-collar" employees in the retail sector as a benefit in that they are not generally expected to work outside of these arranged hours. Instead, the

flexibility afforded to the management population leads to spillover from work to home.

*"I guess everybody's employed to work a certain number of hours per week. Umm... and if you start at the sort of lower end of our population of the workforce...ummm most colleagues are hourly-paid (ahem) so they clock-in and clock-out umm... and generally are not expected to work over the hours that they're employed to work. Because that's just the nature of that type of role. When you get to more senior managerial positions that situation changes because there is no clocking-in and clocking-out process and so it becomes umm... more difficult to actually umm... gauge the hours that those managers work unless they quite openly talk to you about the fact that volume of work is actually causing them a problem. So umm... I would say that if we have any work-life balance concerns they would be at managerial levels, not sort of more junior levels."* ("M", HR Business Partner in large high street retailer)

Viewing this dichotomy from another perspective, "S" examined the two groups in terms of the supervision they required to ensure a healthy work-life balance. More senior staff are expected to be responsible for their own work-life balance to an extent, whereas there is more monitoring of junior staff to ensure they are not under undue pressure.

*"I think again, two levels of staff here. And there is a real distinction for me there. There is an absolute duty to be on top of that with the - what shall we call them? – non-professional staff. I think with the professional staff...I think with the professional staff, they've got to take a level of*

*responsibility. It's about being aware... I have dialogue with people on a weekly basis, and understanding ... you've got to understand where each person is at and what pressures they're feeling. If you're not doing that, it's just part of general management, then you're not doing your job as a manager."* ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)

In addition, there was a sense that managerial/professional employees assumed a level of flexibility and did not necessarily have to request it. This was in contrast with the operational environment, where deviations from set work schedules require managerial permission.

*"The distinction between the two is here, people feel more empowered to say "this is what I'm going to be doing" so the line manager is less likely to say "No you can't". Unless you have that rare line manager who is that control freak. Whereas in the operation, it's more about asking."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

The highly structured and organised work environment typified by the "operation" described by "D" precludes ad hoc flexibility and thus reduces employee options in the face of conflicting demands between work and home domains.

*"And the thought of being... of knowing that my job starts at 530am and it will go through to 1300 in the afternoon... that's me, I have to be in by then and I will be working until then...and these are my activities... so, I can't wander off and easily get a couple of tea. I can't say "Oh my tooth is playing up" or "Something's happened to little Johnny... I've got the school play". I tend to think of that and then, for me, it's how can I build*

*the opportunities for flexibility so that people can have something of what I've got.*" ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

While the "professional" versus "operational" distinction may not be useful in terms of predicting quality of work-life balance, it is an interesting organisational cultural artefact, and could be said to perhaps influence organisational perceptions of the needs of their employees, based on "group" membership. This mental short-hand, or heuristic, for understanding employees' needs and experiences may prevent organisational stakeholders from getting a full and accurate picture of the situation.

### **Sub-theme 2.2b: Role Categorisation**

As noted above, a second categorisation related by interviewees was that based on job roles. There was less agreement across organisations, instead conclusions regarding work-life balance were drawn not on personal circumstances (in general) but on the limitation of specific jobs. Specific examples were references to roles that "required" face to face contact with teams, "operational" roles that were based around set shifts and other external role-defining factors, IT professionals, whose regular support activities often had to take place out of hours at evenings and weekends.

*"Yeah. Umm... well I guess the obvious roles would be roles on the shop floor because you're there to serve the customer and you can't do that from home. Umm... probably our logistics operation, exactly the same.*

*Whether you work in a warehouse or whether you drive a van... you've got to be there.*

**R: Yeah**

*M: Management roles... probably the types of roles where you run a call centre, or something like that, and the operation is absolutely based here and can't be moved anywhere else. If you manage that team, you've got to be there. Emmm... I'm thinking by division... I mean I think with management roles generally it's harder, because you've always got to have a presence. For your team. Umm... So it's probably harder at management level than it is at lower levels."* ("M", HR Business Partner at large high street retailer).

*"On odd occasions, you know, there would be the odd day when you could work from home, but because of the nature of this role, because of the nature of the interaction with people in the office and with suppliers, it is not practical to do this job on a two/three day from home basis. So we're balancing the needs of the business with the needs of the employee."* ("G", HR Director at leisure firm)

The specific challenges associated with part-time roles were explored by "S" in the context of a smaller organisation. He pointed to the fact that part-time employees regularly receive communications from colleagues even when not at work, and because of their relative status or contribution to the business, continue to respond and engage in these communications. "S" ascribed this

continued engagement as a function of the employees' desire to avoid letting their colleagues down – despite the predictable and commonly-understood part-time nature of their roles and thus, their availability.

*"I mean, part-time roles bring work-life balance challenges... Because the business day doesn't stop, you know, on a Wednesday night at 5 o'clock. It continues on a Thursday and Friday. And with communications the way they are, people are bombarded still. Umm... I think with some people who work less than full time there's a feeling of they're not contributing in quite the way of people who work full time... but actually, there's a contract there... they contracted for a certain period and they're remunerated for a certain period. That's what the deal is and you know... so I don't think there's any reason they should contribute more than that contractual relationship. But I think they do. You know. You look at certain people who work less than 100% time... they get communicated with during the rest of their working week, and they respond. I think it's difficult. They have a desire to support their team.. a function of being umm... how would you say... part of the organisation, being part of the team, being committed to it. So they don't want to let people down. So they do respond. And they chip away at their own time. If someone works three days, you always get more than three days." ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)*

**"R: Okay. Are there any roles within your organisation that you're familiar with that bring specific work-life balance challenges?"**

*Operational management definitely... that would be tough, because there are certain time constraints.. [process description] by a certain time to get up the road to the airport to be at the end of the country... "* ("A", Senior HR Business Partner, public sector organisation).

A further interesting distinction was made between employees whose output is easier to quantify and those whose contribution is more difficult to track. It was implied that those with measurable outputs may be allowed more latitude for flexibility as any negative impact on performance would be easier to assess:

*"So when you're looking at revenue-generating areas, that might be where people feel they have a bit more flexibility. My personal view on this is that it's easier to measure their output – they're revenue generators. As long as they're bringing in the money, it doesn't matter. In your infrastructure areas, it's a lot harder to measure their output, so people feel they need to control... there's a lack of trust. If you let John work from home one day, what will the team think? And some line managers don't feel empowered or confident enough to see how that goes because they will be judged by their line manager as not being in control of their team. So there's all this informal noise that goes on in work-life balance and I think in revenue-generating areas where people say it's a lot more difficult to work flexibly, or from home, or part-time, it's actually easier to manage, because of the output and how measurable that is."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

Specifics around the security implications of allowing some people to work from home were raised by "R", but she also pointed out that accommodations had been made for employees in the past, so it was not "impossible". The implication here is that it was a perception of "impossibility" that could be a barrier for traders wishing to work from home.

*"I think from a security perspective, a lot of front office or trading roles may be difficult if the work-life balance means doing some of that work from home. However, I think there is the flexibility in that we're international and different markets are in different time zones, and there are different peaks and troughs and there could be some flexibility built into that. However, I also know that it's also possible for people to trade at home, within the security boundaries that we have, so I know it does happen. And I think we have achieved that for someone here so it's not impossible."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

A distinction between junior and senior members of the organisation was made by "S", pointing out that he gave senior employees a "longer leash" to work flexibly:

*"I suppose my approach is quite paternalistic actually, in a way. I am more specific with more junior members of staff. And will mention it to them and ask them why there is a need and if there's a genuine need then try to restructure things so that need is not there. However, if it's about someone not performing effectively, efficiently, then work with them to determine how they can do the job that they're required to do without reasonable working hours. I think at a more senior level, I think I have a much more stand-back*



*approach. You know... the leash is a lot longer, but similarly... there comes a point when I intervene and have conversations with people.*" ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)

### **Sub-theme 2.3: Expectations regarding working hours**

Particularly in the investment bank environment, expectations regarding "reasonable" working hours were noted as a key factor in perceptions of work-life balance. That is, work-life balance was something that could be addressed outside of these extended working hours, viewed as a central requirement of the working environment. Additionally, the need to be physically visible – referred to as "face time" – was cited as a key performance indicator, which itself leads to longer working hours.

*"And for example, I would probably say for most investment banks, face time is what drives performance. The way we look at performance in a bank, is all about yes it's about results, but also it's about how long can you stay in the office. This person stays here till ten o'clock every night, therefore they must be dedicated. This person might be staying till ten o'clock because they're surfing the internet! They can't do their job very well and they're efficient. So, that's something that I don't think will go quickly, it's something that's a big cultural shift."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank).

Even among those organisational stakeholders apparently encouraging a more inclusive working environment, the extended hours of the average employee in an investment bank were viewed as a necessary evil associated with the job. In addition, there was an inference that it was reasonable to expect new graduates to work similarly long hours:

*"I remember talking to someone when I first joined in another bank and this was someone who was supposed to be championing a lot of inclusion initiatives and they said to me about work-life balance "Well this is an investment bank, we have to work hard. When I was a graduate, I had to work twenty hours a day and I would expect that of any other graduate who comes into this organisation"."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank).

The apparent "elitism" of the investment banking industry was referred to as a potential reason for the long hours culture. That is, some employees voluntarily work longer hours in order to help justify the higher salaries and bonuses they receive:

*"I think for investment banking... it's quite a unique industry. It's similar to the legal profession. It's seen as a sort of elitist industry. And I think people try to justify the bonuses that have been paid, to be perceived by the hours that people do. And yes, people do put in long hours in this industry. But some of that is very bespoke to certain functions within the industry. So people say "You know, we work very hard in order to get these bonuses" and some people have been in the industry for 10 or 15 years... I've heard this from. "And that's why we get so much money and*

*that's why we get the bonuses we do. It's for the amount of time we spend away from our families and friends. You have to sell your soul in this industry". So I think that is often the sort of justifier for working long hours and not having work-life balance.*" ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank).

#### **Sub-theme 2.4: Formal versus informal flexibility**

A very clear distinction emerged between the kind of workplace flexibility afforded to employees through formal amendment of their working agreement or contract and that allowed them on a more informal basis by their line manager. The former involved a formal process requiring the input of HR professionals within the organisation, with the latter at the discretion of the line manager. The former was also associated with a stable, long-term agreement (e.g. reduced hours, term-time working), while the latter was associated with ad hoc or emergency flexibility (e.g. emergency childcare, household repairs etc.).

This is an important theme in that it further supports the need for line managers to have specific understanding of the needs of their direct reports with regard to flexibility, as well as clarity on organisational policy in this regard. It also requires them to use their discretion and balance the needs of the team as a whole when granting informal flexibility.

*"You've got formal flexible working, where someone requests this, it's going to be part of their contract, everyone understands that's what they do. Then there's the informal side, where now and again, people might*

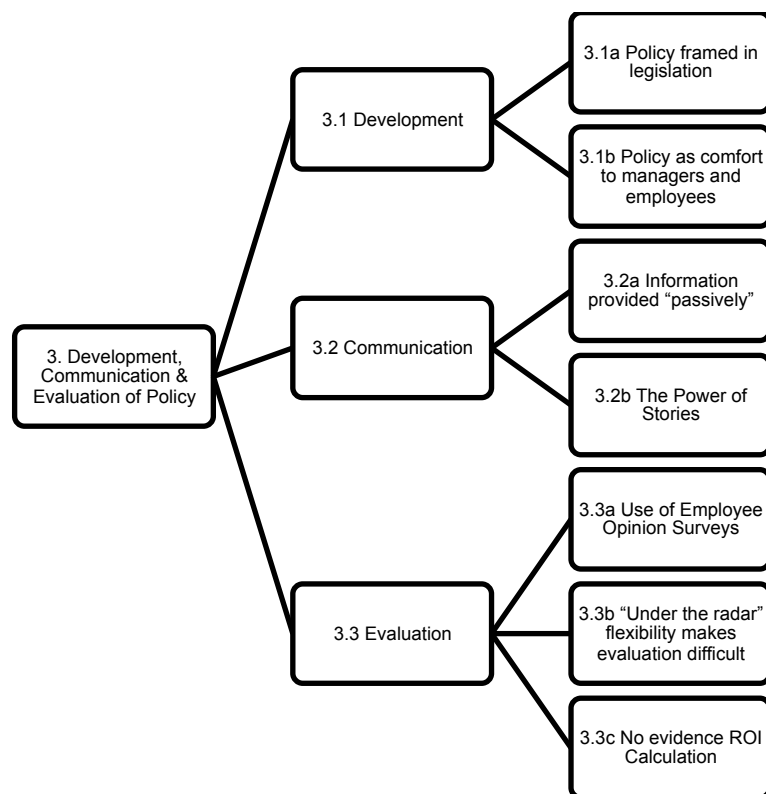
*want to go to the gym in the morning. They might ... this is nothing to do with families. It's just your average person. It's to do with their home life, it's to do with their well-being. They may need to be at home because their partner might be working long hours. They might need to be the one who puts the dinner on, or whatever it might be. There's all those informal things that don't even come in to a policy and that's about the culture of an organisation. Em, so while we're trying to address some of the more formal aspects of work-life balance, em I think there's a whole softer level that comes into work-life balance that's just an understanding that people have difference priorities."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

Interviewees referred to the fact that flexible working policy cannot include all possible eventualities and some requests for flexibility may arise from discrete, episodic events (e.g. illness of a dependent child), while others will be more stable and involve minor flexibility around working hours to enable an employee to fulfill a personal need, such as visiting the gym or attending an educational course.

"R"'s quote above also references the difficulty in formulating policy that is specific enough, without being overly complex or prescriptive. It seems that informal flexibility, as well as addressing ad hoc needs, also serves to address personal needs that are not explicitly covered in organisational policy yet warrant flexibility – at the discretion of the manager, of course. Managerial deployment of informal flexibility, while welcomed by the employees concerned, does of course complicate organisational attempts to track flexible working, and this is a theme that is explored in more detail later in this chapter.

### Theme 3: Development, Communication and Evaluation of Policy

This topic was included in the interview schedule to explore how organisational policy is made manifest: how it is initially developed, then communicated employees and how it is evaluated in terms of employee acceptance and organisational impact.



*Fig 4.5 – Theme 3: Development, Communication & Evaluation of Policy*

The topic of organisational policy was a revealing one in these interviews. In all but one interviews, participants referred to policy at the outset of their responses to organisation, indicating its central place in their conceptualization of work-life balance. In other words, it appears that organisational policy represents the structure around which interviewees' references to work-life balance are made.

"S", the CEO of the consulting firm indicated a position of being anti-policy and emphasizing the need for more human interventions:

*"I don't like policies. I would much rather take a humanistic approach and work with people. I think we have a responsibility, a duty of care, as managers, as people, to people we manage... to our co-workers... for ... getting involved in such issues. I don't think you can control cultural aspects by policies particularly easily. People will find a way around. And quite often in many organisations that I know, it's just rhetoric... it's there for compliance purposes. ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)*

However, even when organisational policy is developed with reference to work-life balance, there is the further step of encouraging employees to explore what is available and request flexibility that may appeal to them. The existence of policy does not automatically result in either its deployment by line managers or indeed in individual employees seeking flexibility under its auspices. As the quote below illustrates, fear of having one's request turned down may prevent come employees from even asking:

*"However, there are other banks that where they'll have their policies that are completely open to everybody, but the culture is that people don't ask. So I think from a cultural perspective, the softer side of things... people ask here because they think they can. So I would like to think that our culture can accommodate flexible working. But from a policy perspective, we're not in line with some of the other banks in our industry. You need both. And do in my experience in working in other banks where they did have the policy,*

*you find that people are afraid to ask because they think it will be turned down.*" (R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank).

This theme of Organisational Policy in turn breaks down into three sub-themes, which address policy development, policy communication and policy evaluation.

### **Sub-theme 3.1: Development**

The development of policy relevant to work-life balance seems to be related to two subordinate themes. Firstly, the origins of flexible working policy are firmly rooted in the relevant legislation. This should not seem surprising – legislative requirements form the basis for much HR policy in European working environments. However, this can become a disadvantage – for both the organisation and its employees – when organisational policy is *limited* to the legislative frameworks.

Secondly, organisational policy referencing flexible working seems to act as a comfort to both managers and employees. For the former, it provides guidelines as to "who" can work flexibly and sets boundaries, thus simplifying their decision-making when evaluating requests for an element of flexibility in working. For the latter, it provides a sets of "rights" to which they can refer when negotiating with managers.

"D" alone referred to the need for policy in this regard to be explicitly linked to the delivery of the organisation's operational goals:

*"So what I do is think about policy in the context of how policy can support the delivery of those operational goals. And linked with that is, what's the overall business strategy and the people strategy within that. So it mustn't come along as a stand alone, so I've ... formally being head of employee relations and inclusion, I was the head of diversity and inclusion for the business and one of the things I very quickly realised is that you've got these other strands and along comes equality alongside... it's got to be right in there. So anything that happens in the policy piece has to support that overall operational organisational goals and has to talk in that language."*  
(“D”, Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

### **Sub-theme 3.1a: Policy Framed in Legislation**

As noted above, the starting place for five out of six interviewees was a reference to existing organisational policy regarding work-life balance:

*"Across the board we have a family policies... we have a flexible working policy. However the policy is pretty much in line with the legislation. So it's open to people who have children of the specific age stated within the legislation, or children with a disability. So that's the general policy we have in our staff handbook. However, in different pockets of the organisation line managers support informal flexible working as well."* (“R”, Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

The above quote is characteristic of interviewees' descriptions of policy, with explicit references to the relevant legislation – they differed, however in terms of



their familiarity with the detail of the legislation and its scope. The fact that there is legislation covering flexible working (which represents one aspect of a more holistic understanding of the work-life balance construct) also seemed to provide interviewees with a form of leverage when addressing this topic organisationally, with senior stakeholders and line managers.

### **Sub-theme 3.1b: Policy as comfort to managers and employees**

A related, but distinct aspect of this sub-theme is the comfort that organizational policy appears to provide to the managers and individual employees who seek flexibility. Managers have a framework in which to work, which provides them with guidance and an understanding of the relative importance of the topic, while employees know they have they have an avenue for redress if the policy is flouted.

*"A: Yeah, I think we're alright. I think... because we have a process and because ... I think the measure of the place in our organisation is that if there is a process, people have confidence. Because, if the process is not followed, they can take action. It's when there's not a process that they feel uncomfortable... that decisions may not be made in a standard way or a... emm... impartial and independent way... an objective way I guess." ("A", Senior HR Business Partner, public sector organisation).*

### **Sub-theme 3.2: Communication**

How organisational policy is communicated to employees is key in that awareness of policy initiatives may be all that stands between an employee struggling to balance hugely conflicting demands from work and home, and a

more flexible approach to work allowing them to balance these demands in a healthier way.

An examination of this topic in the interviews revealed that communication of work-life balance policy does not receive the same attention that initial policy formulation does. Two sub-themes emerged from an exploration of this topic: provision of work-life balance policy information places the onus on the employee to education his or herself and secondly, that information-provision could be described as passive.

### **Sub-theme 3.2a: Passive Communication of Policy**

Several of the interviewees described approaches to communication of policy that could be described as passive, in that they required the employee to actively seek out the relevant information. This highlights the disconnect between the existence of policy and its accessibility and interpretation by employees.

***"R: How would I find out more if I wanted to?"***

*M: Well I'd like to think you'd asked the question before you joined. Umm... but if it was day one, you'd probably find that information through your line manager or your colleagues." ("M", HR Business Partner in large high street retailer)*

*"We do a two-day induction, which involves me, their line manager and people from other departments. So that they get a full view of what the organisation does – and I'm deliberately not saying our name – but a full view of what the organisation does and how they and their job role interact with other people. And as part of my induction we tell them that once they complete their probation period – though there can be flexibility on that as well – that then they could be starting earlier and finishing earlier or starting later and finishing later."* ("G", HR Director in leisure firm)

*"We have a flexible working policy and I would imagine that most colleagues know that that exists. Cos its legislation and most people are aware of it."*  
("M", HR Business Partner in large high street retailer)

Information relating to work-life balance and flexible working seems to be placed in organisational data repositories such as intranets and employee handbooks. The inference from interviewees was that placing the necessary information "out there" in books and web pages was the same as *communicating* the information to employees. In other words, making information available is not the same as ensuring receipt of the information by its intended audience.

*"We... our policy is actually in our handbook. And at the moment, that's given to all employees when they join. And when women go on maternity, it's communicated then. I personally feel – and this is something again that we're going to be looking at this year – it does need to be communicated across the board."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

The following quote, from "A" in a large public sector organisation with a majority of employees working in operational environments, was particularly illuminating.

***"R: Emm... aside from flexible working and those different contracts, do you have any specific policies around work-life balance that employees would be aware of?"***

*A: Yeah, on our intranet there would be tranches of work-life balance philosophy and principles. In our corporate social responsibility and occupational health department, there would be a lot of provision made. We have got an occupational health contract arrangement with ATOS (supplier of occupational health services) who then support any kind of assessment needed to establish whether flexible working or shorter hours working is necessary and how we can accommodate that." ("A", Senior HR Business Partner, public sector organisation).*

The accessibility of work-life balance information doesn't just impact employees, but managers too as the following quote illustrates:

*"So what was very interesting was to say to the managers, this is a data. Some of you have no one in your region on a term-time contract. It was staggering the number of them who said "I didn't know it existed". Emm. Now that's quite shocking, really, Cos when we communicate, we put it in the channels and people should be picking it up. So I'm not sure if that's entirely the case, I think it's also sometimes about it's difficult to do." ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)*

"D" implies that the existence of data concerning flexible working arrangements means it should be digested by managers merely because it has been placed in the various communications channels.

### **Sub-theme 3.2b: The Power of Stories**

Interviewees from the larger organisations independently mentioned the importance of having case studies - or "stories" – to help communicate the topic of work-life balance. The use of case studies was highlighted as a benefit for three distinct groups of organisational stakeholders.

Firstly, case studies can bring the topic alive for managers and illustrate to them in practice the boundaries or discretion they can apply in granting employee flexibility. In addition, they can use the case studies to aid their judgment in assessing requests that are "similar but different" to examples they have encountered before.

Secondly, case studies can illustrate possibilities for employees, highlighting where flexibility has been granted for other employees and providing a more "human" face to potentially complex policies.

Thirdly, case studies that include an evaluation of flexible working arrangements can serve to sway senior stakeholders and convince them of the merits of facilitating a healthier work-life balance in their organisation. However, as the next section illustrates, formal evaluation of such initiatives is seldom pursued.

*"Em... but I think one of the things that should be done is highlighting case-studies. So we have people who do job shares here, we do have flexible working across the bank, but we don't communicate it enough. And I think if you can communicate case studies and also line managers that find it's easy to manage within their teams... communicating how they've found it... from a line manager as well as an employee perspective, I think it's fundamental."*

("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

*"Mmm... obviously, we have policies for pretty much every subject you can imagine. And within those policies we try to give examples or case studies of what a situation might look like and how a line manager would deal with it."*

("M", HR Business Partner in large high street retailer)

*"And another thing, very powerful in our organisation, we did run a feature on term-time working a few months ago. It was either late last year or very early this year, emm... it's telling stories. The power of stories. Because people love a good story. We all do. And if you've got that human interest, you know: this is what I'm doing and this is what it's allowed me to do. It's great. So what I always keep an eye out for is an interesting story, to actually then get it into the newspaper so that it can be shared. So you rely on not one media to get through to people, but several."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

### **Sub-theme 3.3: Evaluation**

While interviewees generally indicated a positive orientation to evaluating their work-life balance policies, none participated in a formal evaluation process outside of transactional employee surveys.

***"R: Do you have any view of what take-up is like of flexible working?"***

*A: Not specifically, but my sense is that as soon as we formally addressed it, the issue went away. If ever there was going to be an issue. So once people understood that we had a process in place to address requests and deal with flexible work-life balance issues in a standard way they were fine with that."* ("A", Senior HR Business Partner at public sector organisation)

***R: Do you have any data or feeling for how popular those policies are?"***

*A: No. No. I don't know that we've ever done a review or monitored the trends or the stats. I don't think it's been an issue to instigate a review of that nature. ("A", Senior HR Business Partner at public sector organisation)*

"S", as CEO of a much smaller organisation, emphasised a more personal approach to evaluation, indicative of his smaller span of control:

*"I have a one to one meeting at least every four weeks with each person, and I like to do it more regularly than that. Emm... if they're more regular, they're probably shorter in duration, whereas every four weeks, you can get a reasonable amount of depth. And I hope that actually through that interaction, I can understand where people are at emotionally... and that any issues associated with a lack of balance would come through.. would fall through those. That really is the barometer for me of where people are and their cycle."* ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)

### **Sub-theme 3.3a: Use of Employee Opinion Surveys**

All but one interviewee referred to the use of employee surveys as their main tool for evaluation of organisational work-life balance policies and initiatives. In addition, these were not discrete work-life balance surveys, rather the annual or similar employee opinion/engagement surveys, containing one or two questions relating to satisfaction with work-life balance – importantly, these did not reference the success or up-take of work-life balance initiatives. Therefore, organisations seem to be failing to link policy initiatives with outcomes, instead preferring to report employee attitudinal data.

**"Have you done any kind of evaluation of the success of your initiatives around work-life balance and flexible working?"**

*It's mentioned in the staff satisfaction survey. And we get comments like... you know [company name] is brilliant at recognising that we have a life outside of work", "When I was going through whatever trauma, my team*



*were great", "It's great being able to work from home", having a new kitchen delivered or whatever. People do appreciate it."* ("G", HR Director in Leisure firm).

*"We have an employee opinion survey called [survey name] which has questions in there about work-life balance. And we have a specific question about work-life balance. But I don't think people pay a huge amount of attention to it if I'm being quite candid."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

*"Very difficult. But surveys help. Employee opinion surveys do help. And some of the questions that I've seen in my experience in this industry are around "Would you ask for flexible working?", "Would you feel comfortable asking for it?" And what you tend to find is that there's 70% to 80% who say "Yes, I would like some flexibility around my role". Would you ask for it? "No, I wouldn't". The reasons why could be very different for each individual, but normally it's a cultural thing, that they feel if they ask for it, their commitment to their job gets questioned... their career development gets questioned. Any chance of promotion may get questioned. That seems to be the trend across the industry."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

***"R: Okay. At the more junior levels, where you have some metrics around the hours people are doing, what would bring a concern to your attentions? Is there a process in place, if it looks like someone is taking on too much?"***

*M: Emm... the only ... well... there's one sort of key process and that's called <<survey>>. So we actually have a sort of colleague survey and part of that survey asks the direct question about emm.. work-life balance. So... I can't remember what the question is, but it's something like "Do you have a successful work-life balance, you know, with the organisation".* ("M", HR Business Partner in large high street retailer).

### **Sub-theme 3.3b: "Under the radar" flexibility complicating evaluation**

When exploring the topic of evaluating work-life balance policy, interviewees mentioned the difficulties posed by the large volumes of informal flexibility existing in their organisations – as a result, they felt it was impossible to get a true measure of who was benefitting from flexible working arrangements. This sort of informal arrangement was described as being "under the radar" of the central HR function.

*"I would say it's quite low, compared to other industries. Within our industry, I'd say it's about average. But that's on the formal side. That's what we know. What we don't know are all the informal relationships and informal agreements that people have for work-life balance within their teams. When I've done this in another organisation, I noticed that when we start to look at*

*informal work-life balance arrangements within a team, you know, there's probably about 70% of people who say "Some Fridays I can leave early, because I need to do x, y and z and my boss is fine with that". But it's not recorded. So when we start to look at stats and things, it's never a true representation of what's actually happening in the organisation."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

### **Sub-theme 3.3c: No evidence of Return on Investment (ROI) calculation**

Interviewees were asked directly about organisational attempts to measure the return on investment from work-life balance policies. In other words, did their organisations attempt to link the outcomes of efforts to improve employees' work-life balance with any kind of outcome variable such as employee productivity? None of the interviewees were able to indicate that their organisation engaged in any formal ROI analysis of these initiatives.

***"R: Have you ever... attempted to link the successful work-life balance response you're getting from people with an objective measure like some kind of objective sales output or anything like that?"***

G: No we've not

***R: You don't associate it with a business measure?"***

G: No. ("G", HR Director at Leisure firm)

"M" explored the possibility of linking work-life balance initiatives to employee outputs by getting feedback from managers. This, however, is not standard practice in the organisation and represents a potential activity, not a policy.

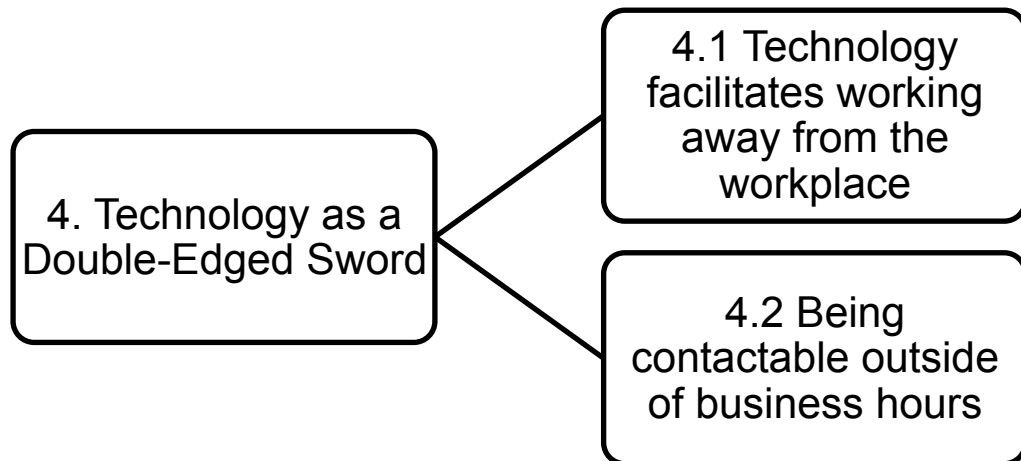
*"But I guess the only other way of evaluating it is seeking feedback from line managers in terms of are they seeing more productivity from their team members as a result of this, or do they feel a bit distant and removed from what they're actually doing?"* ("M", HR Business Partner in large high street retailer).

#### **Theme 4: Technology as a Double-Edged Sword**

The use of work-related technology such as mobile phones, laptop computers and blackberries was discussed in a majority of interviews and participants' reflections on technology indicated it can have both positive and negative impacts on employees. On the one hand, for those employees with access to the technology, it can be liberating, freeing them from a static work environment and facilitating work from other locations, including home when required.

On the other hand, the mobile nature of this technology – particularly blackberries – means that work is often brought home through employees being in constant contact with their colleagues and manager. It seems that access to this technology facilitates overspill from the work to home domain through a need to "keep in touch" while outside working hours.

The following diagram represents how this theme and its constituent sub-themes fit together.



*Fig 4.5 – Theme 4: Technology as a Double-Edged Sword*

#### **Sub-theme 4.1: Technology facilitates working away from the workplace**

Interviewees were generally in agreement that work-related technology allows employees to continue to work while away from the workplace. It should be noted that this is still subject to the role constraints explored earlier, such that this sort of technology is not universally available to employees and tends to be concentrated among the “white collar” or “professional” role-holders.

*“Yeah. Certainly for white-collar, managerial roles... we’re all blackberried-up, mobiled-up, laptop’d-up. We’re now even getting slightly smarter with our technology on our laptops. It’s much more web-based applications and emm... platforms, technology platforms that we can now access our work from. So a couple of weeks ago when we were all snowed in, everybody was expecting it here in London, so everybody brought their laptops home.*

*Not a problem. Accessed our shared drives, our emails, so it was like being in the office."* ("A", Senior HR Business partner, public sector organisation).

This sub-theme was generally positive, in contrast to the later sub-themes concerning the use of such technology. Here, interviewees referred to the power of technology to facilitate working from home rather than the workplace in the event of issues with public transport or extreme weather. Such flexibility minimizes the impact on productivity that disruptions like this can cause.

Aside from spending the entire working day at home, modern communications technology allows employees to continue to work from home either side of the standard working day. An example cited by a number of interviewees was that of the parent who needs to leave work at a certain time to pick up their children from school. Once back home, a laptop and mobile phone allows them to reconnect with work and complete their day's activities from home. Interviewees also referred to employees who left the workplace at a time that enabled them to eat a meal with their family in the evening, and who would then finish work for the day once children had been put to bed.

*"So people will readily work from home. They can organise personal appointments more easily in the day, because technology allows them to be more productive later in the day or earlier in the morning, or at weekends."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

*"Working from home is a great solution – not only do you save on the commuting time, but you also get more out of the individual. I know that studies like BT have done where they've said that most of their people that work from home are 20% more productive. Now I fundamentally believe that*

*as I used to have a job where I worked from home.*" ("A", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

#### **Sub-theme 4.2: Being contactable outside of business hours**

A more negative aspect to the use of communications technology outside of the workplace arose when interviewees addressed the topic of employees being contacted outside of their agreed working hours. Again, this overwhelming applies to "professional" or "white-collar" employee groups and can be divided into two types.

The first manifestation of this sub-theme is when employees feel obliged to take out of hours calls and respond to emails outside of work, just because the technology their employer has supplied them allows them to.

*A: Emm... because there is an expectation, albeit an informal and unwritten... and this is my perception.. that if you've got a blackberry and a mobile, then you are accessible. And so you would check your emails periodically when you're not in work at the weekend or in the evenings, in case anything has come through that you can bat out a quick answer to.*

***R: So, a major difference there would be the white-collar employees would tend to take more work home with them?***

*A: Yeah... or would choose to. Not necessarily required to, but it tends to become custom practice.*" ("A", Senior HR Business Partner, public sector organisation).

The second manifestation of this sub-theme is employee driven, where they feel the need to stay in touch, unprompted by colleagues or managers. In other words, they use the technology (e.g. Blackberry) to check-in on the progress of work outside of hours. The examples described by interviewees resemble a classic overspill of the work experience into the home domain, and in these instances, communications technology appears to be the conduit through which this occurs.

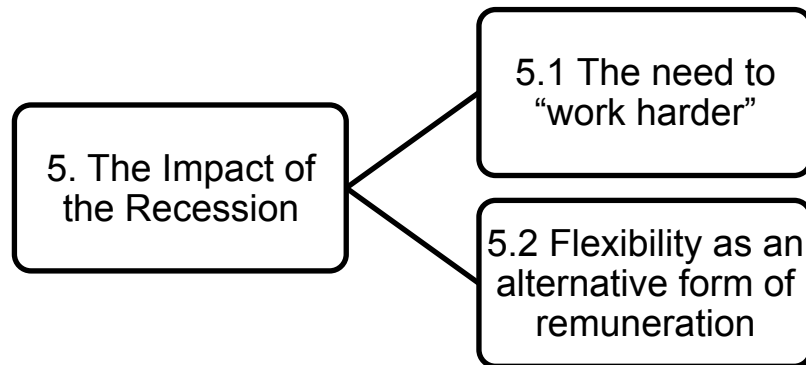
*"So I think it does get to a stage where you've got your Blackberry, where something comes to mind and remember to speak to that person tomorrow, you bang out an email straight away. And that puts, albeit an informal unwritten, unspoken pressure on people to... keep up to speed."* ("A", Senior HR Business Partner, public sector organisation)

## **Theme 5: The Impact of the Recession**

As outlined in the previous chapter, this research took place during a significant economic downturn. It was viewed as crucial to explore the potential impact the wider economic context could have on work-life balance policy development and deployment. Responses from interviewees pointed to a number of consistent organisational responses, as outlined in the following below.

The theme itself can be divided into two further sub-themes, involving the perceived need to "work harder" and the potential for use of additional workplace flexibility as an alternative to remuneration.





*Fig 4.5 – Theme 5: The Impact of the Recession*

#### **Sub-theme 5.1: The need to “work harder”**

A consistent theme emerged referencing employee responses, which took the form of somehow “working harder” in response to the recession. The following quotes illustrate how interviewees believed the recession in the UK and wider economic environment is impacting organisational expectations regarding workload and effort.

*“Umm... (Long pause) I don’t think so because I don’t think, fortunately, the business has changed that much. I mean, we’re in a very competitive environment and it’s getting more and more competitive so I guess, yes, I guess naturally the business is expecting more from colleagues. Especially because of the industry we work in... we’re in an industry that’s actually doing okay and so the pressure is constantly on to keep that momentum going, so I think colleagues are probably feeling the pressure of that and the extra work that’s coming through and no extra headcount and no extra resource available. So, yes in that respect,*

*they... they do feel it.*" ("M", HR Business Partner in large high street retailer).

*"I think it's two-fold. Firstly, a lot of people have said "We've got to work that extra bit harder". We've been hit by the financial crisis. We've had to look at costs... we have had to look at various things across the business. People think "We've really got to get on with it". It means working harder now."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

"M" also inferred that the recession, and associated perceptions of workload and effort, could impact employees' willingness to explore flexible working arrangements with their manager. "M" hypothesized that employees in this position would prefer to explore solutions outside of the workplace, rather than seek additional flexibility in the present economic context.

*"The more local arrangement? Possibly. So, colleagues may well feel under pressure not to do that because they're seeing their colleagues around them working longer hours... and them asking to come in later and leave earlier, it's not going to be popular, so probably trying to scrabble around finding other alternatives outside of work. I would imagine that's possible, yeah."* ("M", HR Business Partner in large high street retailer).

"D" referred to the phenomenon of "presenteeism", with employees attempting to *appear* to be working harder by staying in the workplace for long. The

potential for negative impact on work-life balance is clear with this kind of behavioural response.

*"Yes, I do actually. I think people are working – certainly I've noticed it here – I think people are working longer hours, there's a degree of presenteeism emerging. It's certainly seems to have borne out from what I've read externally... people feeling they need to get in earlier and stay later... be around. Umm.. which I don't think it terribly healthy."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

#### **Sub-theme 5.2: Flexibility as an alternative form of remuneration**

An interesting perspective on the impact of the recession was the potential to offer additional flexibility to employees as a form of remuneration or reward, especially in environments where increased salary or bonus would be frowned upon. In addition, creative approaches to role design could be adopted to avoid headcount reduction through redundancy.

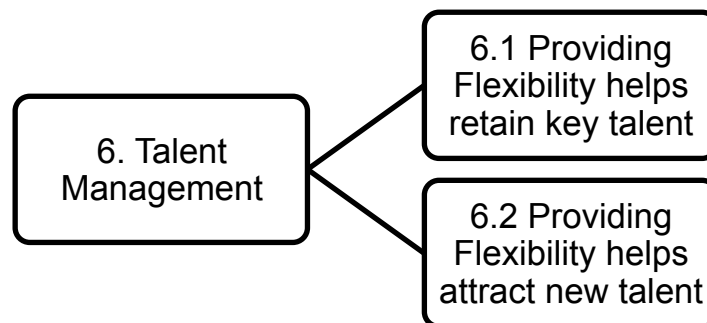
*"However, when it comes to looking at things like redundancies for example, across the industry, I personally saw this as a good opportunity for us to look at flexible working as a solution. And I think it was something within the investment banking industry that just didn't happen. In the legal industry and in the professional services industry – accountancy and management consultancies – it happened. People were working four-day weeks, a lot of the partners went on to four-day weeks in the legal firms, because they knew that they needed to save costs that year and they wanted to retain the*

*talent. And what better way than to say "Here's the situation we're in... who would like a three-day week? Who would like to go on sabbatical for six months, a year"... whatever it might be. It's a chance for people to fulfil their dreams, do things they'd always wanted to but never could do before. And I think it could have been a solution. However, I think in the investment banking industry, it was seen as.. because the banks were involved in the financial crisis, it was seen as a case of "Right, we've got to work harder and faster" and I think a trick was missed there."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

*"But on the other hand, I think this could be an opportunity for us to really think the way that we recognise our talent and reward our talent and think about other things other than money or monetary rewards. Rewarding people who work hard. It might be that your average banker who has to work until two or three o'clock in the morning, taking clients out or whatever, instead of saying you'll get a big bonus, we'll give you more work-life balance. And I think this would help in terms of some of the decisions that are made. I can't see how an average human being can work for twenty-odd hours a day and make level-headed decisions the next day when they come in. So I think there's a big opportunity, but I honestly don't think it will be taken because I don't think the industry is ready for that. The industry is still defending itself and still licking its wounds from the crisis."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

## Theme 6: Talent Management

The final theme to emerge from the interviews was that of talent management. Interviewees referred to the benefits that facilitating a positive work-life balance could bring in terms of both retaining key talent and also attracting new talent to the organisation.



*Fig 4.6 – Theme 6: Talent Management*

### Sub-theme 6.1: Providing Flexibility helps retain key talent

“R” referred to the benefits of retaining great employees as a result of the price of changing senior stakeholders’ attitudes to flexible working arrangements.

*“There is a cost associated with work-life balance – the cost is that sometimes people have to change their way of thinking. But can you put an actual price to that? No. But can you retain employees through that? Yes you can. Em. And that’s the most important thing. And it’s not just about retaining them, but it’s about keeping them motivated and happy while they’re here as well.”* (“R”, Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

"S" also mentioned the benefits that a more flexible attitude to work can have in retaining talented employees who face work-life balance challenges as a result of the design of their job:

*"And it's about saying to an individual who's just come from an overnight flight from New York or where ever it may be, that you don't have to get into the office at 8 o'clock on the morning because by 2 o'clock that individual will probably be on the floor. It's about saying what works for you? Go home, unpack your suitcase, log on later. Because, that way, you're going to get the most out of that individual."* ("R", Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Investment Bank)

"A" provided an interesting example of the lengths some employers will go to in order to retain key employees who are experiencing work-life balance difficulties. In this case, a talented legal professional had their role redesigned and was provided with additional administrative support in order to avoid them having to leave the organisation:

***"R: It sounds very accommodating... changing structure in response to a single employee"***

*A: She happens to be excellent and we'd do anything to keep her".* ("A", Senior HR Business Partner, public sector organisation)

"S" explicitly addressed the challenges that flexible working arrangements bring but contrasted them with the benefit of having talented employees.

*"Something has to give sometimes. But where we can achieve it, then absolutely achieve it. We have a policy of... look at our management team..."*

*what percentage would that be? Dunno. 40% work less than 100% contract. And with a new person coming in, that person might work less, so it might be 60% of our management team working less than 100%, so I think that's pretty flexible actually. Umm... does that cause issues? Yeah, we have to have work-arounds. Absolutely. Are they such an issue? Not actually, because I'd rather have those people on that flexible basis than other people who might not be on a flexible basis.*

**R: Mm-hmm. So it's also about attracting the right people?**

*S: Absolutely. It's only about the people. And that's it. That's everything, as far as I'm concerned.*" ("S", CEO of Consulting Firm)

### **Sub-theme 6.2: Providing Flexibility helps attract new talent**

The final sub-theme to emerge from the analysis was the role of flexible working arrangements in talent attraction. Several of the interviewees addressed this topic and highlighted flexible working as a definite plus in terms of attracting the most talented people to work in their organisations:

*"Because it's very important I think for work-life balance to not come over as "Oh well, that's touchy-feeling, oh that's very sweet, but actually we're here to make money and we can't be having any of that business". Em. Well actually, I think we can. Because through offering it, we can keep people, we can attract people, it's good for brand."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)

"D" provided a number of examples of using flexible working arrangements to attract prospective employees from sections of the community who may have had preconceptions about barriers to organisational entry as a result of their own circumstances. For example, actively reaching out to female candidates and exploring what was preventing them from applying for certain roles. "D" described putting together new roles in an attempt to recruit younger mothers into roles previously associated with men.

*"And that means from a manpower planning perspective, I need less staff. So why don't I then offering existing staff the opportunity to take time out over the summer, um why don't I offer it as an attraction tool who traditionally we haven't recruited from."* ("D", Head of Employee Relations and Inclusion, public sector organisation)



#### **4.4 Discussion**

As stated at the outset of this chapter, the aims of this project were to clarify and understand the senior stakeholder perspective on work-life balance, to better understand their conceptualisation of the construct and their view of the employee population and its needs for flexible working arrangements.

The analysis highlighted a number of important and consistent themes that emerged from the stakeholder interviews. These have implications for practitioners in this field, for employees seeking to improve their work-life balance and for employers seeking to balance employee needs against those of commercial or operational pressures.

Formulation of policy seems to have been largely influenced by the relevant legislation, which is in itself focused on the provision of flexible working based on gender (e.g. maternity leave, flexible working for parents, normally mothers), echoing the point made by McDonald et al (1994). However, deployment of policy seems to rely largely on another categorisation entirely, represented by a hierarchical "blue-collar" versus "white-collar" dichotomy. In summary, managerial employees are given more latitude to work flexibly than their operational, non-managerial colleagues. This is implied through provision of technology such as laptop computers and made explicit through job design than emphasises the fixed location and duration of work.

Before exploring the main implications of the research, it is perhaps worthwhile focusing on one of the more interesting outcomes from the interviews. That is, interviewees related an overwhelming focus on the temporal aspects of work-life balance as a concept (i.e. time management, work organisation, attendance

at work), with far less attention paid to the cognitive, emotional and well-being aspects of the construct.

Furthermore, interviewees struggled to articulate their conceptualisation of work-life balance outside of a time-management framework (Thompson et al, 1992), emphasising the negative outcomes of interference between the work and non-work domains and failing to reference the potential for positive domain interaction in either direction (PWHI or PHWI).

This combines to point to a general understanding (with some exceptions) of work-life balance as a challenge involving minimising the negative impact of one domain on another, but ignoring the potential for positive impact. Considering the present stakeholder group interviewed, this opens the possibility that this preconception has influenced the design of work-life balance policies deployed in their organisations.

The strength of themes emerging from such a diverse group of interviewees points to their validity and coherence and identifies them as suitable topics for further analysis.

#### **4.4.1 The crucial role of line managers**

Line managers appear to be the crucial pathway between policy and real-world flexibility for employees (Thompson et al, *ibid*). Unfortunately, for many employees, they represent an obstacle, rather than a facilitating force. In part, this may be due to lack of knowledge or understanding of work-life balance policy, but as the above analysis has revealed, it may also be due to the negative connotations of providing flexibility to employees (i.e. additional

workload for the manager, disruption to work-plans, setting an unwelcome precedent for others).

Line managers are under the twin pressures of having to interpret and implement policy that they (normally) have had no part in designing, while balancing the needs of their team members against the commercial or operational requirements of their organisation.

As McCarthy et al (2010) point out, the devolution of decision-making with regard to work-life balance from HR to the line could result in increased inconsistency of policy interpretation and deployment. Wise (2005) has highlighted the high levels of variability in terms of interpretation of the same policy between line managers.

The implications for organisations, and HR professionals in particular, are clear. From an organisational perspective, line managers need support from HR professionals to better understand the concept and increase their familiarity with organisational policy. This can assist in ensuring policy is applied consistently and fairly within the organisation. Standardisation of process may also assist in reducing the role of interpersonal relationships in employees' efforts to obtain increased flexibility.

Secondly, the benefits or "wins" a flexible approach can bring to the workplace need to be made explicit to line managers. As outlined above, the use of case studies can assist with this process, especially when addressing ambiguous situations. This could move the entire concept of work-life balance or flexible working from being viewed as an onerous chore to more of an additional tool the manager can draw upon to get the best out of their team.

#### **4.4.2 The impact of technology on work-life balance**

Technology appears to both enable flexibility for employees, while simultaneously possessing the potential to seriously impact home life. Modern communications technology allows many employees to work virtually for at least part of their working week. This reduces their daily commute, and if the above is representative, enables them to be more productive. If nothing else, employees working from home are no longer at the mercy of either weather- or transport-based disruptions.

A number of the interviews in this study were conducted in early 2010 during a particularly harsh period of winter weather in the Greater London area. Interviewees made reference to the impact the snow, and ensuing travel disruption, had on workplace productivity. Many hours were lost with employees battling to get into work, many more when they left work early to get home before evening travel disruption delayed them even more. Employees with laptops and mobile phones simply worked from home and avoided the travel chaos.

However, it is crucial to remember that this applied only to those employees who could actually work from home. As interviewees pointed out, many roles cannot be performed outside of the workplace or even outside of certain pre-determined shift-periods. While tools such as laptops and blackberries can keep employees in touch, freeing them from their desks and offices, there is an apparent negative aspect to this pervasive technology (Duxbury & Higgins, 2003).

As the above analysis highlights, some employees are experiencing a backlash from technology, resulting in out-of-hours contact and communication, as well as a feeling that they *should* keep abreast of developments in the workplace, just because they *can*. This represents a form of negative domain interaction (work-to-home in direction), weakening the boundaries between work and non-work domains to the detriment of home life (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001).

A further implication of this analysis is the uneven distribution of access to this technology. This project has highlighted that provision of flexibility-enabling technology is overwhelmingly the experience of the "professional" or "white-collar" workforce. Those employees in the "operational" or "blue-collar" groups tend not to have access to this kind of technology, reducing their opportunities to, for example, work from home on an occasional basis, or indeed keep in touch with their team while out of the office. It is dangerous to assume that the introduction of flexibility-facilitating technology such as the blackberry or laptop computer assists all employees.

The implications here for organisations are clear: the introduction of technology to increase flexibility must not be at the cost of effective boundaries with work and non-work domains and increased workload or even time spent at work. Organisational guidelines should emphasise appropriate use of this kind of technology and managers should be tasked with monitoring its use among their teams.

#### **4.4.3 Perceptions of group differences**

The professional versus operational distinction was made by all interviewees, suggesting a need for complimentary approaches to managing employee work-life balance for these groups, or at least increased sensitivity to their opportunities for flexibility and their respective challenges to negotiation of work and non-work demands.

The converse of this argument is to ensure that organisations don't design and roll-out work-life balance initiatives on the back of *assumed* differences between these groups, but instead conduct research to identify the needs of all employees. If such group differences are borne out by the data, they should be incorporated and should inform policy. However, in the absence of data, they are merely organisational myths.

A middle ground between these two positions is for organisations to be sensitive to the context in which their employees work, which should include constraints of the role, availability of supporting technology and operational requirements. Ideally, organisations should avoid designing roles that preclude any aspect of flexibility in how they are staffed.

#### **4.4.4 Implementation and evaluation of Policy**

Policy and real-world implementation of flexible working differ markedly due to local informal practices. This complicates any evaluation that can be undertaken – yet doesn't make it impossible. None of the interviewees in this study

conducted formal evaluation of their work-life balance policies or initiatives, outside of measurements of employee opinion via pre-existing surveys.

The potential benefits of increased return-on-investment (ROI) analysis include:

An important feedback loop into the policy formulation process within the organisation, allowing stakeholders to use data to drive the design process and make informed decisions regarding the utility of processes and policies.

In a recessionary environment, stakeholders who can demonstrate a return on investment made, in quantitative terms, will be better able to articulate the benefits of work-life balance initiatives than evaluation based purely on self-report employee opinion data.

The communication of the benefits of flexible working and a focus on work-life balance to managers will be made easier by the provision of a data-driven argument as opposed to one that points solely to the legislative requirements.

Formal evaluation can also provide the organisation with useful case studies, which can feed into managerial educational processes and provide evidence of best practice.

Data driven evidence of the benefits or successes of work-life balance initiatives can also help put pay to naive associations between flexible working and lower or poorer contribution to the organisation. Such data can help de-stigmatise flexible working arrangements and illustrate to all stakeholders, including employees, that flexibility can work.

This evidence can also move the discussion about granting of flexibility from one that is dependent on interpersonal relationships between manager and direct report to one that focuses on benefits to both organisation and employee.

An implication of this for organisations is that more effort needs to be put in to conducting such formal evaluations and moving them beyond transactional or cross-sectional investigations. A related implication for practitioners is the need to clearly articulate the benefits of such evaluations and then deploy the research skills to bring the data to life for their client organisations.

#### **4.5 Limitations of the present study**

Yardley (2000) provides an excellent account of the contrasts between quantitative and qualitative approaches in psychological research. She points out that a lack of an agreed set of "quality control" criteria for qualitative research leaves psychologists open to a number of unintentional errors, including the "aping" or mirroring of approaches to the evaluation of quantitative research. This would include inappropriate references to the reliability and replicability of findings and a quantitative emphasis on sampling methodology.

Yardley instead presents an alternative set of criteria against which the quality of qualitative output can be evaluated. The present study is evaluated against these criteria as follows:

**Sensitivity to context:** Yardley advocates a thorough understanding of the theoretical context in which the research is undertaken. This is represented here by the focus on research to date in work-life balance and the attempts made to address a number of the methodological weaknesses inherent in the



research base. In particular, the need to be sensitive to the national context (as explored in Chapter 1) and organisational context (by exploring both public and private sector environments) are addressed here. In addition, sensitivity to the wider socio-economic context was addressed by including reference to the impact of the recession on the topic at hand. Another perspective on sensitivity to context is the social context between researcher and participants. In this regard, it is important to highlight that half of the research participants were previously known to the researcher - two in the context of client relationships, one in an employment context. This will have had an impact on the dynamic of the interviews, but it could be argued that the pre-existing relationships facilitated more open discussion of the topics at hand. In addition, the interviews were framed very firmly in the domain of academic research, as opposed to any form of commercial endeavour.

**Commitment and Rigour:** Here, Yardley refers to the quality of the methodologies adopted, the data collection, the analysis and the reporting. This research project sets out the framework within which it was conducted and follows a pre-existing approach to thematic analysis to illustrate the source of the themes discussed above. This criterion also refers to the adequacy of the sample included in the research. In contrast to quantitative methods, which often emphasise sample size, qualitative methods pay more attention to the make-up of the sample and its ability to adequately address the topic at hand. The sample included in this project all had direct experience in the formulation and deployment of work-life balance policy. In addition, an attempt was made to source participants from a range of organisational contexts, in terms of both size and sector.

**Transparency and Coherence:** Here, Yardley draws attention to the importance of transparent description of the processes utilised and clarity in terms of coding and transcription. As outlined above, all transcription was performed by the author to facilitate familiarisation with the content and to ensure accuracy. The coding used to arrive at the themes reported here is set out in Appendix 2 and full transcriptions of all interviews are of course available for evaluation on request.

**Impact and Importance:** By this, Yardley means the impact of the research on the research base and it's relative importance in terms of new knowledge. As set out above, conscious designs were made to address the perceived weaknesses of some existing research in an attempt to bring clarity to the topic of work-life balance.

#### **4.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented the results of the qualitative research project and identified the themes and sub-themes to emerge from the thematic analysis of interview transcripts.

The following chapter brings together the outputs from the quantitative and qualitative research phases and discusses the synergy of the mixed methods approach, support for the original hypotheses and implications of the results for relevant stakeholder groups.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter brings together the outputs from the research outlined in chapters 3 and 4 and presents the emergent themes, identifying synergies apparent from the mixed methods approach. A reminder of the original aims and objectives of the research is provided and support for the research hypotheses outlined in chapter 1 is discussed. This reflection on hypothesis-testing is presented in terms of impact on existing theory and evidence regarding the work-home interface and its impact on employees. Resulting implications for relevant stakeholders are suggested. In addition, the potential methodological weaknesses of the research are addressed. Finally, suggestions for the focus of future work-life balance research are presented.

It is useful to revisit the original aims and objectives of this research before reviewing the results in more depth. As set out in Chapter 1, there were three over-arching aims:

1. To investigate the role of demographic factors and individual differences.
2. To investigate the role of organisational work-life balance culture and job design.
3. To investigate attitudes to work-life balance in the context of international recession.

These aims were formulated to address perceived gaps in the work-life balance literature, which also influenced the choice of methodological approach

adopted. As per a mixed methods design, these research aims were addressed using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. Based on the results presented in chapters 3 and 4, a majority of these hypotheses were supported by the data – a number of which raise questions to be addressed in future research. Suggestions for the focus of this research are covered later in section 5.7.

## **5.2 Synthesis of Results**

The results presented in chapters 3 and 4 approach the work-life balance concept from their respective quantitative and qualitative perspectives. This section brings the results from both together and presents how, when combined, they address the original aims of the research, how they inform each other and together, provide a fuller and more detailed picture of work-life balance; a core aim of adopting a mixed-methods approach.

### **5.2.1 The Nature of Work-Life Balance**

The data from the studies outlined in preceding chapters provide some valuable insights into the nature of the work-life balance concept. Chapter 1 outlined the evolution of the concept since the 1950s and identified several competing explanatory models. The results of this research indicate that the ecological systems theory perspective (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000) is useful, providing input into an understanding of the work-home interface that traditional approaches fail to capture. This perspective encourages an examination of work-life balance from several complimentary vantage points, including that of the employee (including their biological, organisational and societal identities), the impact of organisational culture and job design on the employee's

experience of work and the wider economic context in which the organisation is operating. Each of these levels has been shown to contribute to a better understanding of the work-home interface.

Secondly, the Domain Interaction model (e.g. Geurts et al., 2005) of measuring work-life balance outcomes has demonstrated the validity of its four-factor model of the work-home interface. Its constituent factors are orthogonal in nature and therefore all require measurement if a holistic picture of work-life balance is to be established for researchers and organisations. Data analyses in chapter 3 illustrated that positive and negative domain interaction are not simply opposite ends of the same continuum but in fact separate mechanisms.

A related point, also emergent from the quantitative data, is the importance of distinguishing between domain interactions and work-life balance satisfaction, as the two are not interchangeable. The former emphasise the outcomes – positive and negative – resultant from domain interaction, while the latter represents an overall evaluation of work-life balance in general. For example while negative work-to-home interaction correlated negatively with work-life balance satisfaction, there was no corresponding correlation between negative home-to-work interaction and general satisfaction with work-life balance. Satisfaction is de-coupled from domain interaction outcomes where significant differences emerge in one area (satisfaction) but not the other (outcomes) – this was true in the case of parents in the sample, who were significantly less satisfied with their work-life balance than non-parents. However, there was no significant difference in domain interaction outcomes between these two groups. This raises an important point regarding the measurement of work-life balance issues within organisations, discussed in section 5.2.3 below.

Finally, the qualitative interviews illustrated that organisational stakeholders' conceptualisations of work-life balance focused primarily on the temporal aspects, rather than the emotional or cognitive aspects of this construct. Put another way, their focus emphasized aspects of time management, schedules and presence versus absence from the workplace. Their perspective – arguably an influential one within their own organisations - doesn't acknowledge the possibility of either positive domain interaction or indeed negative domain interaction with an emotional focus (e.g. being unable to enjoy activities in one's private life due to worries about work).

### **5.2.2 The role of demographic factors and individual differences**

Chapter 3 highlighted the value of including measurement of employee individual differences when researching work-life balance. Indeed the work locus of control construct demonstrated its utility as an explanatory variable in moderating the relationship between negative domain interaction outcomes and employee ratings of wellbeing. The data indicate an internally-oriented work locus of control is beneficial in navigating work-life balance challenges. Work locus of control influences the interpretation of external events and also behaviours deployed in response to external stimuli (Rotter, 1966; Spector, 1988; Kirkcaldy et al, 2002) and so may be a key variable in furthering our understanding of how employees interpret and act on their interpretations of both positive and negative domain interaction. It is unlikely to be the only aspect of personality playing a role here, but its central role in appraisal of challenges is important in navigation through challenges to work-life balance.

While other demographic differences emerged from the data, these did not represent significant differences in the experience of domain interaction outcomes, but in work-life balance satisfaction and appraisal of the organisational work-life balance culture (see section 5.3.3 below for an exploration of this latter theme). Parents viewed their work-life balance in significantly more negative terms than non-parents in the sample, yet their domain interaction outcomes did not differ, as noted above. Thus, if the focus is on work-life balance satisfaction, parents will appear to be disadvantaged compared to non-parents, where actually their experience of negative outcomes does not differ. These differences did mirror the emphasis of parental status as a focus for flexible working arrangements in the organisations included in the qualitative research. While parents have identifiable challenges to a "positive work-life balance" (e.g. managing childcare) their non-parent colleagues may well have challenges impacting their own work-home interface, though these many not receive the organisational attention they may deserve due to the focus on flexibility for employees with children.

The link between experience of the work-home interact and wellbeing was supported by the quantitative data, illustrating the correlation between negative domain interaction and poor wellbeing as measured by the GHQ12. Though not established as a causal relationship due to methodological limitations of this project, NWHI explained 22% of the variance in GHQ12 scores, which should help to prioritise work-life balance as a legitimate focus for employee wellbeing interventions.

### **5.2.3 The role of Organisational Work-life Balance Culture and Job Design**

The group differences that emerged in employees' appraisal of organisational work-life balance culture highlight the need to take a diversity-based approach when investigating this topic, one that is mindful of and sensitive to group differences. The need for this approach has recently been identified by researchers (e.g. Ozbilgin et al, 2010; Moen & Sweet, 2004) as it addresses some of the legacy conceptualisations of the family unit and acknowledges the increased diversity of the employee population. Differences in satisfaction with organisational work-life balance culture emerged on a number of variables, not least gender – the demographic that has received the lions share of research attention in work-life balance over the last fifty years (Lewis, 2007).

Other group differences – such as those between employees in a relationship and their single counterparts – emphasise the need for a work-life balance culture that doesn't favour any employee group, implicitly or otherwise. Responses from single employees – who felt more pressure to work longer hours and were more wary of adopting flexible working practices for fear of the impact this would have on their career – illustrate the benefits of adopting what Casper et al (2007) termed the "singles-friendly culture". Again, there appears to be a divergence between satisfaction with work-life balance culture and general satisfaction with work-life balance.

In addition, these group differences are not mirrored in stakeholders' implicit grouping of employees (blue-collar versus white-collar or role-based) but are rooted at the demographic level, suggesting a disconnect between how employees see their negotiation of life between work and home and how their



employers view them.

Again, when bringing together data from quantitative and qualitative phases, the question should be asked: could employees' perceptions of the work-life balance culture in their workplace be improved by better communication of formal policy? This was an area of relative weakness emerging from the qualitative interviews, in that communication of work-life policy tended to be passive (through the media of intranets and employee handbooks). With more information and facts, would employees respond to questions regarding work-life balance culture differently? It could assist with addressing misconceptions about access to flexibility and the potential impact of flexible working on their career prospects.

Interviews also highlighted the lack of appropriate measurement or evaluation of work-life balance. There was a focus on measuring satisfaction – not outcomes – and a lack of evaluation of the impact of organisational policies. As a result, organisational stakeholders lack the relevant data upon which to make decisions to help mould and shape policy. Falling back on group differences at such a high level (e.g. "professional" versus "operational" staff, parents versus non-parents) can perpetuate inaccurate messaging around organisational expectations regarding work-life balance and flexibility at work.

The role of line managers was identified as a crucial component of work-life balance policy implementation. Interviewees related how these managers are relied upon to interpret and implement work-life balance policy, while, in this sample at least, line managers reported experiencing worse domain interaction outcomes (NWHI). This potentially places them in a conflicted position when

evaluating the flexible-working needs of their direct reports. Additionally, in the absence of hard data, such managers may fall back on generalisations (again, based on high-level demographic distinctions) with regard to who is "deserving" of flexible working arrangements.

Basic job design factors, such as pace and volume of work, also appear to impact employees' experience of the work-home interface, leading to increased negative domain interaction outcomes. When viewed in the light of the outputs from the qualitative study, these differences would appear to be ingrained in the thinking of the HR professionals interviewed, in that they explicitly divided employees into those whose roles appear conducive to flexible working and those for whom either job design or function meant flexible working was difficult, if not impossible. The second delineation identified by interviewees was the "blue collar" versus "white collar" distinction that appears to predetermine access to flexibility and in some cases completely overlap with the functional distinctions (i.e. managers can have flexibility because they can do their job from anywhere, operational staff need to be present and under supervision).

While it is appropriate to take job design factors into account when examining the potential for flexible working and indeed the potential for poor job design itself to negatively impact the employee, it is limiting to categorically group employees on these bases, rather than consider what their needs as individual employees may be. Thus, the mental short-hand, translated into policy by the interviewees, places potential limitations on the extent of flexibility afforded to employees on a categorical, rather than individual, basis.

#### **5.2.4 Attitudes to Work-Life Balance in the Context of International Recession**

Hypotheses 7a and 7b referred to the impact of the wider economic climate on both the employee experience of work-life balance and senior stakeholder evaluations of its relative importance to employees. Data from the qualitative and quantitative phases illustrated that the present economic climate has had an impact on how both employees and employers view work-life balance. Employees indicated a change in the relative importance of work-life balance in their overall appraisals of priorities and also that they had sacrificed some measure of balance in order to keep their job. In this sense, the recession is having a very clear impact on both attitudes and behaviour. Interviewees also acknowledged the impact of recession and emphasised the need to "work harder", a message that seems to have been acknowledged by employees.

Employees have perhaps acknowledged the increased "bargaining power" of employers in a recessionary context (Naithani, 2010), but this behavioural change raises questions about the sustainability of reductions in flexible working arrangements and increased workload. These results also support the adoption of an ecological systems perspective when examining work-life balance by highlighting the relevance of macro-level economic factors on perceptions of the construct. The data from both phases of research also illustrate the relative nature of work-life balance. That is, its importance to both individual employees and the organisations in which they work depends on external economic factors as well as internal cultural ones.

### **5.3 Benefits of a Mixed Methods Approach**

It is clear from the preceding chapters that the mixed methods approach adopted for this research has brought demonstrable benefits to the projects and provided additional insight impossible to gain from a single methodological approach.

Firstly, the mixed methods design provided valuable insight from both the employee and employer perspective. This highlighted the alignment of attitude (e.g. changing views of work-life balance in the light of economic slowdown) and where attitudes differed. An example of the latter was the clear delineation among interviewees in the qualitative phase who distinguished between "white collar" and "blue collar" employees and their work-life balance needs, whereas employees responding to the first quantitative survey emerged as differing significantly in their views of flexible working along gender, relationship status and sexual orientation lines. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) highlight this as a benefit of the mixed methods approach, where the qualitative contribution can provide sensitivity to the categories used by participants; this is in contrast the quantitative methods which "force" their pre-determined categorical distinctions on participants.

In addition, the mixed methods approach facilitated the adoption of an ecological systems perspective. Specifically, the survey methods deployed during phase 1 permitted collection of a large amount of quantitative employee data to test the majority of hypotheses outlined in chapter 1. However collection of such data among a much smaller pool of senior stakeholders – the aim of the second phase of research – was facilitated by interview methodology and the

ensuing thematic analysis brought clarity and structure to the outputs. Taken as a whole, the data paint a holistic picture of the various factors impacting on employees' experience of the work-home interface.

The semi-structured interview format allowed for exploration and deviation from script as interviewee responses dictated, permitting far more flexibility than a structured and rigid survey method. It facilitated the avoidance of confirmation bias (a risk highlighted by Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This allowed for an iterative development of the qualitative phase as interviews were carried out, with each interview informing the subsequent interview to varying degrees. This form of research is impossible using quantitative methods.

## **5.4 Implications of the Results**

It is important to note the implications of these results, but also to consider how they can be aligned and communicated to the relevant stakeholder groups in terms of implications for action.

### **5.4.1 Adoption of a Domain Interaction Model of Work-life Balance**

Methodologically, researchers need to ensure they examine the work-home interface from a **bi-directional perspective**, thus acknowledging that work and non-work domains can and do interact and impact on each other (Guerts et al, 2005). Additionally, researchers should acknowledge the positive as well as negative impact the domains can have on each other, moving away from models presuming inter-domain conflict.

Adoption of such a model necessarily requires use of measures that are

appropriate to the assessment of work-life balance. These must go beyond self-evaluation of overall work-life balance satisfaction, and include measures of behaviours that indicate positive or negative domain interaction outcomes. The relative nature of satisfaction with perceived balance means a focus on behaviours and outcomes is crucial. The SWING questionnaire, as deployed in the first quantitative study, serves as a useful example of how work-life balance outcomes can be measured. This can provide organisations with data on which to base policy decisions and can clarify employee understanding and attitudes towards work-life balance.

From a domain-interaction perspective, researchers should consider how they conceptualise the work and non-work domains and ensure that their operational definitions **do not limit the non-work domain** to simply the activities taking place in the home (e.g. childcare, housework and so on) but extend the concept to include all of the activities an employee may engage in outside of work. This could include, but is not limited to, leisure activities, socializing, self-development and education, pro-social and charitable involvement and activities associated with their religious or spiritual affiliation.

Emphasising domain interaction moves away from models of work-life balance that pre-suppose domain conflict or which implicitly exclude some employees due to restrictive definitions of "family" and the "life" in work-life balance.

### 5.4.2 Adoption of an Ecological Systems Perspective

Increased sensitivity to the wider extra-organisational context is also required, including an acknowledgement of the role played by national and international economies, the context of job security and the contemporary state of sectors and industries in which their research participants are employed. The experience of work does not occur in a vacuum and this wider world should be reflected to give valuable context to the results of research. These studies have demonstrated that employees and employers factor-in the wider economic landscape when considering work-life balance, thus researchers should do the same.

The other levels of interest in an ecological systems model of work-life balance may not necessarily mesh with psychologists' experience or core skills. Therefore, psychologists conducting research in the area of work-life balance should consider **increased cooperation with other professions** to extend the relevance of the outputs and ensure the concept of work-life balance is examined in a holistic way. The potential for synergy from the synthesis of research perspectives, specialization and methodologies could only be to the advantage of increasing understanding of work-life balance from a number of perspectives, including:

Working with **health professionals** such as Health Psychologists and Occupational Health professionals, psychologists can better understand how experience of the work-home interface and its negative outcomes impact employee health-related behaviours (e.g. diet choice and physical exercise) and health outcomes (obesity, fitness for work, stress-related illnesses etc.).

Similarly acknowledging potential for positive domain interaction, they can examine the potential for the health benefits arising from such positive interaction.

Considering the perspective of the employing organisation, psychologists can work with **specialists in organisational effectiveness** to provide objective evaluation of flexible working initiatives to assess their impact on key metrics such as productivity, profit and employee turnover and retention. The narrative of "return on investment" is one just emerging as an imperative for HR professionals. Psychologists should include evaluation of interventions to their research priorities to facilitate organisational understanding of the potential impact of these interventions on their key performance indicators.

Working in cooperation with **economists**, psychologists can expand their understanding of the role of work-life balance in the wider national and international economy, its status as an organisational imperative during economic downturn and its relative importance to employees and job-seekers. Increased understanding of this may help to raise the profile of work-life balance and its economic impact both among senior organisational stakeholders, but also among governmental and non-governmental policy developers and associated advisory bodies (e.g. Confederation of British Industry, Institute of Directors).

While work, including job design and the occupational stress process have been extremely well-researched, psychology could benefit from cooperation with behavioural economists and sociologists to **better understand the nature of the non-work domain of employees**. This may also serve to increase inter-



specialism agreement as to operational definitions of the concepts and bring additional clarity to a concept receiving concurrent research attention from a number of professions.

The simplistic categorizations adopted by qualitative research participants highlights the **need for employee research** in their organisations. This needs to extend beyond a single item in their standard employee opinion survey, but instead take the form of specific research to address the experience of employees with regard to their work-home interface. This should include some level of experiential evaluation of policy and its deployment in the organisation, as well as a measure of employee awareness of the flexible working arrangements available to them. Research in this context will clarify the perception of and relative influence of organisational work-life balance culture.

A very clear message from the qualitative research study was the absence of any structured evaluation of the return on investment (ROI) from provision of flexible working arrangements. **Objective analyses of how an organisation benefits from flexible working arrangements** can provide useful leverage for stakeholders when presenting the case for additional attention and focus on the issue of work-life Balance. Were organisations able to fully understand the impact an improved work-life balance has on employee satisfaction, productivity, engagement, turnover and other key organisational metrics, its status as a lever of change would certainly change. The emphasis here, as with all calculations of ROI, is to communicate a value to the organisation in terms that it prioritises – more often than not, this means placing a financial value on the return.

Reviewing the experience at the individual, organisational and societal levels will therefore provide a clearer and more coherent representation of contemporary work-life balance and the factors that impact it for employees. A true ecological systems perspective on work-life balance will also ensure better cultural alignment as it will examine the societal norms and assess their impact on work-life balance.

#### **5.4.3 Sensitivity to Employee Diversity**

Researchers should ensure they **increase sensitivity to diversity issues** in their samples and recognize the roles that various demographic factors (such as age, sexual orientation, relationship status and caring responsibilities) (e.g. Ozbilgin et al, 2010; Casper et al, 2007; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010) have on employees' experience of the work-home interface. This will help to move research on work-life balance from being viewed simply as a "womens' issue" or something that impacts parents only, to one that concerns all employees irrespective of gender. As noted above, in addition to considering demographic diversity, researchers should consider the impact of individual differences on employees' behavior and experience of the work-home interface.

Researchers should demonstrate **sensitivity to the selection of research populations** to ensure the potential for generalisability of their results (Schultheiss, 2006; Ozbilgin et al., 2010). While interesting, it can be limiting to focus only on employees in roles with pre-existing challenges to work-life balance (e.g. the emergency services). Additionally, the explicit recruitment and inclusion of minority groups in research will assist in the applicability of results.

Researchers must address the work-life balance experiences of non-professionals, of single people, of gay and lesbian employees and for those employees whose role requires a fixed location (as opposed to mobile professionals in the "knowledge economy"). This research demonstrated the group differences that emerge when employees provide feedback on how they view the organisation's work-life balance culture, illustrating the heterogeneous nature of work-life balance experience.

As with researchers in this area, **employers need to exhibit more sensitivity to diversity issues** when addressing the work-home interface. This means extension of policy in this area to all employees, regardless of relationship or parental/caregiver status. This will help increase the perceived inclusivity of policy in this area and reduce the opportunity for minorities to be excluded, either intentionally or otherwise. This may also remove the concept of flexible working arrangements from "special case" status to something employees and employers conceive of as the "norm" and not necessarily associated with any single demographic group (Casper et al., 2007).

The outputs from the qualitative study illustrated the categorical approach interviewees adopted when considering employees, focusing predominantly on those employees who explicitly benefit from flexible working legislation. The references to "blue collar" and "white collar" employees and extrapolated assumptions about their need for flexibility also illustrate how employers need to move beyond simplistic formulations when considering their employee population. The first quantitative study highlighted the increased experience of negative work-to-home interaction (NWHI) among managers, compared to non-managers, highlighting another perspective on this assumed dichotomy. That is,

despite additional options for flexible working, facilitated by (a degree of) flexible job design and access to communications technology such as laptop computers and Blackberrys, managers experience more negative interaction in the direction from work to home. As a population, they potentially require additional attention to explore their experience in more depth.

#### **5.4.4 Sensitive Use of Terminology**

Related to the above point, researchers must adopt a more inclusive nomenclature and terminology when describing the concepts relevant to this area. Thus, referring to "work-family balance" or "work-family conflict" as synonyms for the overarching concept of work-life balance are insufficiently accurate – they reinforce commonly held beliefs that managing work and home demands are only the concern of those with "families" and secondly that conflict between the domains is somehow inevitable or that perfect balance between domains is either desirable or indeed achievable (Lewis, 2003; Schultheiss, 2006).

It is undoubtedly a significant challenge to move the terminology used beyond the limiting references to "work-life balance". An alternative perspective is for researchers to apply stricter definitions to the processes of conflict, interaction, spillover and facilitation within the theme of work-life balance, rather than conflating them as previously highlighted. It is arguably too late to present consumers of science with an alternative to "work-life balance" as an overarching principle, but researchers can and should operationally define which part of the construct they are investigating at any given time. The situation is

perhaps analogous to the development of occupational stress as a research topic. Despite work to help consumers of psychological research distinguish between stressors, strain and stress, "stress" is still often used as a common catch-all for the topic, particularly in the popular press. Therefore, increased specificity within the construct of work-life balance is perhaps preferable when communicating research to consumers, rather than re-branding the concept with alternative terminology (e.g. work/non-work balance, work-life facilitation, domain interaction and so on).

As with researchers, organisational stakeholders (e.g. policy developers) should **exhibit care regarding the language and terminology used** to address the work-life balance concept. Inaccurate terminology can limit organisational understanding of the scope of work-life balance as a focus for intervention and result in dated attitudes continuing to thrive. For example, referring to "work-family balance" or "family-friendly" policies can lead to the exclusion (or indeed the self-exclusion) of employees from initiatives to address imbalance (Moen, 2010; Crane & Hill, 2009).

#### **5.4.5 Ensuring Line Manager Competence and Support**

Line managers have been identified as the key, yet often weak, link in the chain between policy development, deployment, interpretation and uptake on the part of employees when it comes to increasing work flexibility (Thompson et al, 1999; Burke, 2006). Outputs from the qualitative phase highlighted the crucial role of managers in this regard. The onus is on employers who wish to improve

workplace flexibility and the fair interpretation and application of policies by managers to **ensure those managers are both competent and confident** in their ability to do so.

Managers in the first quantitative study reported a poorer work-life balance (as evidenced by higher negative work-to-home interaction) than non-managers. This may well be due to the additional administrative and pastoral workload they carry as managers of people. Tasking them with administering complex or counterintuitive flexible working arrangements may be perceived as an additional burden. Outputs from the qualitative research project described above indicated that line managers often view requests for flexibility as a "hassle" on top of their core responsibilities. McCarthy et al (2010) and Wise (2005) have pointed to the risks of delegating HR policy interpretation to the line. Managers therefore need appropriate training and ongoing support in order to facilitate flexible working initiatives and to feel confident to address ad hoc requests for flexibility as they arise.

The qualitative study also highlighted the emphasis interviewees placed on working hours and their conceptualization of work-life balance in terms of flexibility around these hours. It would be beneficial for organisations to **adopt a more holistic definition of work-life balance** which shifts the emphasis from hours worked to something both parties in the equation – employer and employee – can see the logic of. For example, an increased emphasis on outputs rather than inputs. In other words, productivity over presenteeism. Thus, the organisational dialogue regarding employees' work-life balance becomes less about how much you do, but what you achieve; less about where and when you do, but what the outcomes are.

#### **5.4.6 Governmental Support**

There is an additional stakeholder group not yet discussed, one that has the potential to have considerable impact on the state of work-life balance research in the UK. That is central government. At the point of writing, the UK government is in the process of progressing on the previous administration's legislative pathway regarding provision of flexible working. However, this is done in the face of vociferous opposition from business groups and lobbying organisations equating provision of flexibility with cost to business. The government has a key role to play in ensuring that legislation and guidance to UK organisation is research-led and that messages from government emphasise the win-win nature of addressing work-life balance:

For the individual employee, increased satisfaction with involvement in both work and non-work domains of life.

At the organisational level, increased employee engagement, reduced turnover and increased productivity – all key performance indicators that can easily be translated into financial gains.

At the societal level, reduced load on the governmental support structures such as social security for the unemployed who cannot find roles with sufficient flexibility for their caring demands or for those who leave roles that place overwhelming demands on the employee; decreased load on the health system consistent with a reduction in job-related strain and its associated somatic symptoms.

## **5.5 Potential Methodological Weaknesses**

It is useful to highlight and discuss the potential weaknesses of the research in order to:

- a) Put the results into appropriate context
- b) Assist with identification of further iterative improvements to research methodology for subsequent studies

### **5.5.1 Organisational Sample**

Due to limitations of organisational access previously outlined, a convenience sample was utilised for the two quantitative studies. This sample was accessed via social networking sites, whereas a specific sample from a single organisational entity would have been a preferable option. However, sampling via the internet is becoming more common and despite the methods used, the final sample in both surveys was broadly representative in terms of gender though there was an age imbalance towards respondents in their 30s and 40s.

A strength of this approach has been to demonstrate the impact of organisational culture despite the participants coming from a range of organisations; in other words, demographic differences emerged despite the variety of organisational backgrounds. This highlights both the relative nature of satisfaction with work-life balance and also the relative stability of demographic differences across organisational contexts.



Future research initiatives could control for this by replicating these studies within a single organisational context to test for the strength of demographic difference.

In addition, the relatively small number of respondents with caring responsibilities for older adults – despite an increase in the size of this so-called “sandwich generation” (Pierret, 2006) – was disappointing. Future research is obviously required to examine the experience of these employees in addressing the competing demands of the workplace and child- and elder care.

Finally, the small sizes of some groups for comparison purposes raises the issue of lack of power when detecting group differences. It is entirely feasible that statistically significant group differences – which would add to the understanding of the impact of such variables on the experience of the work-home interface – would emerge where group sizes were larger. A larger sample in any replication or elaboration of this research, combined perhaps with initiatives to explicitly recruit individuals in these categories, could be used to address this.

### **5.5.2 Length of the questionnaire**

Feedback from a number of participants pointed to the length of the combined measure deployed in the initial quantitative survey as a reason for non-completion. The methodological necessity for inclusion of a variety of disparate measures into a single questionnaire should have been balanced by increased consideration for the respondent's experience of completion. The original data set had to be cleansed of a large number of responses that failed to continue past the demographic questions. This was obviously disappointing, but on the

other hand demonstrated that it was more likely to be questionnaire length, rather than sensitivity of the questions posed, to be the cause for dropout. By responding to the demographic items at the outset of the questionnaire, which included items tracking sexual orientation and age, the most sensitive items had already been covered.

### **5.5.3 Separate Quantitative Studies**

Despite the utility of the data collected from the two quantitative studies, with hindsight it would have been advantageous to assess both employee experience of work-life balance and employee views on the recession in a single measure. This obviously needs to be balanced with the issue of questionnaire length, however the ability to join up data addressing outcomes of domain interaction (i.e. the SWING measure) with attitudes to the wider economic environment, would have been interesting. The fact that, as stated above, a convenience sample was used for both of these questionnaires made any join-up extremely difficult. Replication of the research in a single organisation, or which more exact tracking of participants, would allow for this to be achieved even if measures were deployed at intervals to reduce the load on respondents.

### **5.5.4 Psychometric Properties of the Coping Measure**

As outlined in Chapter 3, the very low scale reliability coefficients for the Cybernetic Coping Scale (CCS) measure precluded further analysis of the coping data or testing of the coping-related hypotheses. This was a

disappointing result and leads directly to a suggested area for future research in the next section.

#### **5.5.5 Sample Size and Demographic Differences**

Related to the nature of the convenience sample obtained in this research, some of the sample sizes for demographic groups were extremely small (e.g. respondents who had caring responsibilities for an older adult). This resulted in a lack of power to detect statistically significant differences when examining group differences. In other words, given a larger sample, such statistically significant results may well have emerged. Given the reasonable scale reliability of the key measures used apart from the Coping measure, ensuring a larger sample size in future research initiatives represents a pragmatic response to this statistical challenge.

#### **5.5.6 Common Method Variance**

The variance of measured variables can be separated into three components: trait variance, method variance and error variance. Common method variance occurs when variance is due to the measurement method rather than the variable of interest. The data collected in studies one and two were reliant on self-report responses to questionnaires. Researchers have critiqued the use of self-report measures for contributing to common method variance (e.g. Spector, 2006). One approach to overcoming this potential error in measurement is a split sample design – however, this more complex design can effectively reduce the sample size for comparison purposes. A further solution is the deployment of measures at different points in time to avoid conflation of topics of interest or possible contamination of responses to one measure onto another (e.g.

experience of negative work-to-home interactions and evaluation of organisational support for work-life balance and flexibility). This adds further complexity to the research design, but is required to address this methodological risk when combining multiple self-report measures in a single measure administered at one point in time. The use of qualitative methods, in addition to some element of quantitative, survey-based measure to investigate the research questions in phase one represents another possible solution to the challenge of common method variance.

#### **5.5.7 Levels of measurement**

As outlined in section 3.7.5, measurement of the organisational level of inquiry was in fact taken at the individual level. That is, it consisted of the individual employees' perceptions of organisational factors, rather than organisational level measurement itself. The sector of the organisation (i.e. public or private) was an exception to this, representing an objective organisational variable of interest. Measurement of organisational level variables of interest is complicated by the fact that much of the relevant data is collected at the individual level (e.g. employee perceptions of the workplace). However, any future replication of this research could benefit from organisational level data collected independently of the individual level data to more clearly delineate between these levels and further clarify the relative contributions of these levels of the experience of the work-home interface.

## 5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

The above reflections on implications for both researchers and organisational stakeholders lead neatly into a discussion of specific research which would allow expansion on the topics explored in this research.

One topic arising from this research is the need to **more fully examine the relative contribution of personality** to employees' experience of the work-home interface. As noted earlier, work locus of control is unlikely to be the sole factor involved, so further research on other stable personality factors (e.g. Type A personality cluster, Neuroticism etc.) and their impact on decision-making and behaviour. Research to further demonstrate the impact of personality – a relatively stable construct over the lifetime – has implications for selection criteria for roles that present challenges to employees' work-life balance (e.g. shift-work, on-call duty etc) to ensure better person-job fit and help to protect the wellbeing of employees. In other words, for those roles where it is recognized significant risks to the work-home interface exist, risk factors for undesirable behavioural responses, moderated by personality, could be explored through the use of appropriate personality measures. While these should not be used to preclude selection for these types of roles, such measures could be utilised in order to select with a view to provide development interventions for those recruits more likely to experience poor work-life balance outcomes.

A related need is a **fuller exploration of the role of coping** strategies employees use when faced with perceived imbalance. The disappointing results

from this research precluded a detailed examination of coping and domain interaction outcomes and personality.

Schultheiss (2006) and others have pointed to the "middle class bias" in work-life balance research. The qualitative phase of this project highlighted organisational stakeholders' casual delineation of employees into "white collar" and "blue collar". Further exploration of **the needs of "blue-collar" employees** is required, especially given the static nature of many roles in this category (e.g. production environments).

Technology was identified as a "double edged sword" in the qualitative phase of this research. Research is required to assess **the impact of communication technology** on employee behaviour relevant to the work-home interface. Related to the first point, it would be interesting to understand how employees' personality impacts its use.

Addressing criticisms of the cross-sectional nature of much of the work-life balance literature (this project included), **longitudinal research involving evaluation of interventions** to improve work-life balance is required. Evaluations of job-related stress interventions (e.g. Bond & Bunce, 2000) can serve as a useful model for such studies.

Considering the impact of line manager interpretation of flexible working policies and deployment of same, an examination of line managers' decision-making regarding the granting of flexibility and their conceptualisation of work-life balance would also be welcome.

## **6. Conclusions**

The preceding chapters have illustrated the benefits of adopting an ecological systems perspective when examining work-life balance in the contemporary workplace. This multi-layered perspective has highlighted the relative influence of both demographic factors and individual differences on employees experience of the work-home interface and the organisational work-life balance culture. Moving beyond the traditional demographic foci of gender and parental status, these data illustrate the impact of relationship status, caring responsibilities and sexual orientation on how employees interpret the interface between work and home. They also support previous calls for a more diversity-sensitive approach to researching this topic.

Measuring work-life balance through assessment of both satisfaction and domain interaction outcomes has demonstrated the relevance of the latter and illustrated the limitations of focusing merely on the former. It has also demonstrated the strength of considering the work-home interface from a bi-directional perspective.

The data have highlighted the apparent disconnect between work-life balance policy developers and the employees for whom the policies are intended. Senior stakeholders' broad categorisations of employees do not map directly onto the above demographic differences and indeed run the risk of fostering a work-life balance culture that is not diversity-focused, perhaps even exclusionary.

The impact of the wider economic climate has also been examined and found to be relevant to work-life balance. Both employees and senior stakeholders are factoring the recession into their decisions about work-life balance.

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## Appendix A: Online Survey Measures

### 1. Work-Life Balance Culture

(Dikkers, J, Geurts, S, Den Dulk, L, Peper, B and Kompier, M, 2004)

*(Response scale: Strongly disagree / disagree / neutral / agree / strongly agree)*

1. Managers in this organisation are generally considerate towards the private life of employees
2. In this organisation, people are sympathetic towards care responsibilities of employees
3. In this organisation, it is considered important that, beyond their work, employees have sufficient time left for their private life
4. This organisation is supportive of employees who want to switch to less demanding jobs for private reasons
5. My colleagues support employees who want to switch to less demanding jobs for private reasons
6. My colleagues support employees who (temporarily) want to reduce their working hours for private reasons
7. I am comfortable in discussing aspects of my private life with my colleagues
8. My colleagues help me out when I am (temporarily) preoccupied with my care responsibilities
9. My superior supports employees who want to switch to less demanding jobs for private reasons
10. My superior supports employees who (temporarily) want to reduce their working hours for private reasons
11. I am comfortable in discussing my private life with my superior
12. To get ahead at this organisation, employees are expected to work overtime on a regular basis

13. In order to be taken seriously in this organisation, employees should work long days and be available all of the time
14. In this organisation, employees are expected to put their job before their private life when necessary
15. Employees who (temporarily) reduce their working hours for private reasons are considered less ambitious in this organisation
16. To turn down a promotion for private reasons will harm one's career progress in this organisation
17. Employees who (temporarily) reduce their working hours for private reasons are less likely to advance their career in this organisation
18. In this organisation, it is more acceptable for women to (temporarily) reduce their working hours for private reasons than for men

## **2. Dutch Questionnaire on The Experience and Assessment of Work (VBBA)**

(Items taken from the VBBA Questionnaire, Van Veldhoven et al, 2002)

***(Response Scale: Always / Often / Sometimes / Never)***

1. Do you have to work very fast?
2. Do you have too much work to do?
3. Do you have to work extra hard in order to complete something?
4. Do you work under time pressure?
5. Do you have to hurry?
6. Can you do your work with ease?
7. Do you find that you are behind in your work activities?
8. Do you find that you do not have enough work?
9. Do you have problems with the work pace?
10. Do you have problems with the work pressure?
11. Would you prefer a calmer work pace?
12. Does your work demand a lot of concentration?
13. Do you have to work with a lot of precision?
14. Do you have to be attentive to many things at the same time?
15. Does your work require continual thought?
16. Do you have to give continuous attention to your work?
17. Do you have to remember many things in your work?

18. Does your work require a great deal of carefulness?
19. Does your work demand a lot from you emotionally?
20. Are you confronted with things that affect you personally in your work?
21. Do others call on you personally in your work?
22. Do you feel personally attacked or threatened in your work?
23. Do you have contact with difficult clients or patients in your work?
24. In your work, do you have to be able to convince or persuade people?
25. Does your work put you in emotionally upsetting situations?

### **3. SWING (Survey Work-Home Interface Nijmegen)**

(Geurts, S, Taris, T, Kompier, M, Dijkers, J, Van Hooff, M and Kinnunen, U, 2005)

***(Response Scale: Never / Practically Never / Sometimes / Often)***

**How often does it happen that...**

1. You are irritable at home because your work is demanding?
2. You do not fully enjoy the company of your spouse/family/friends because you worry about your work?
3. You find it difficult to fulfill your domestic obligations because you are constantly thinking about your work?
4. You have to cancel appointments with your spouse/family/friends due to work-related commitments?
5. Your work schedule makes it difficult for you to fulfill your domestic obligations?
6. You do not have the energy to engage in leisure activities with your spouse/family/friends because of your job?
7. You have to work so hard that you do not have time for any of your hobbies?
8. Your work obligations make it difficult for you to feel relaxed at home?
9. Your work takes up time that you would have liked to spend with your spouse/family/friends?
10. The situation at home makes you so irritable that you take your frustrations out on your colleagues?
11. You do not fully enjoy your work because you worry about your home situation?
12. You have difficulty concentrating on your work because you are preoccupied with domestic matters?

13. Problems with your spouse/family/friends affect your job performance?
14. You arrive late at work because of domestic obligations?
15. You do not feel like working because of problems with your spouse/family/friends?
16. You come home cheerfully after a successful day at work, positively affecting the atmosphere at home?
17. After a pleasant working day/working week, you feel more in the mood to engage in activities with your spouse/family/friends?
18. You fulfill your domestic obligations better because of the things you have learned on your job?
19. You are better able to keep appointments at home because your job requires this as well?
20. You manage your time at home more efficiently as a result of the way you do your job?
21. You are better able to interact with your spouse/family/friends as a result of the things you have learned at work?
22. After spending time with your spouse/ family/ friends, you go to work in a good mood, positively affecting the atmosphere at work?
23. After spending a pleasant weekend with your spouse/family/friends, you have more fun in your job?
24. You take your responsibilities at work more seriously because you are required to do the same at home?
25. You are better able to keep appointments at work because you are required to do the same at home?
26. You manage your time at work more efficiently because at home you have to do that as well?
27. You have greater self-confidence at work because you have your home life well organized?



## **4. Cybernetic Coping Scale**

(Edwards, J. R, 1991)

### **Changing the Situation**

1. I tried to change the situation to get what I wanted
2. I focused my efforts on changing the situation
3. I worked on changing the situation to get what I wanted
4. I tried to fix what was wrong with the situation

### **Accommodation**

5. I made an effort to change my expectations
6. I tried to convince myself that the way things were was, in fact, acceptable
7. I tried to adjust my expectations to meet the situation
8. I tried to adjust my own standards

### **Devaluation**

9. I tried to convince myself that the problem was not very important after all
10. I told myself the problem was unimportant
11. I told myself the problem wasn't so serious after all
12. I told myself the problem wasn't such a big deal after all

### **Avoidance**

13. I tried to keep from thinking about the problem
14. I tried to turn my attention away from the problem
15. I refused to think about the problem
16. I tried to avoid thinking about the problem

### **Symptom reduction**

17. I tried to just let off steam
18. I tried to relieve my tension somehow

- 19. I just tried to get it off my chest
- 20. I just tried to relax

## **5. Work-Life Balance Attitudes Measure**

### **(Author's own measure)**

- 1. The recent economic downturn has impacted how I view the importance of work-life balance
- 2. People in my organisation have lost their jobs due to the recent economic downturn.
- 3. When considering work-life balance, I am more concerned about my personal life interfering with my work responsibilities
- 4. Due to the recent economic downturn, work-life balance is now less important to me than job security
- 5. Employers are responsible for the work-life balance of their employees
- 6. I have had to sacrifice some element of work-life balance in order to keep my job
- 7. The current economic downturn means I am less likely to ask my manager about flexible working options (e.g. working from home, four-day week etc)
- 8. I believe that achieving a good work-life balance is the responsibility of employees
- 9. When considering work-life balance, I am more concerned about work interfering with responsibilities in my personal life

10. I believe that as the economic situation improves, I will be able to improve my work-life balance

## 6. General Health Questionnaire - GHQ12

(Goldberg, 1972)

**Have you recently?**

1 – Been able to concentrate on what you're doing?

Better than usual		Same as usual		Worse than usual		Much worse than usual	
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2 – Lost much sleep over worry?

Not at all		No more than usual		Rather more than usual		Much more than usual	
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3 – Felt that you are playing a useful part in things?

More so than usual		Same as usual		Less useful than usual		Much less useful	
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4 – Felt capable of making decisions about things?

More so than usual		Same as usual		Less useful than usual		Much less useful	
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5 – Felt constantly under strain?

Not at all		No more than usual		Rather more than usual		Much more than usual	
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6 – Felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?

Not at all		No more than usual		Rather more than usual		Much more than usual	
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7 – Been able to enjoy your normal day to day activities?

Not at all		No more than usual		Rather more than usual		Much more than usual	
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**Have you recently?**

8 – Been able to face up to your problems?

More so than usual		Same as usual		Less able than usual		Much less able	
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9 – Been unhappy and feeling depressed?

Not at all		No more than usual		Rather more than usual		Much more than usual	
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10 – Been losing confidence in yourself?

Not at all		No more than usual		Rather more than usual		Much more than usual	
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11 – Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?

Not at all		No more than usual		Rather more than usual		Much more than usual	
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12 – Been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered?

Better than usual		About the same		Less well than usual		Much less well	
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## **Appendix B: Qualitative Interviews – Initial Questions**

(Author's own)

1. How does your organisation specifically address employees' work-life balance?
2. Can you describe what specific policies you have in place regarding work-life balance?
3. What is employee uptake like with regard to these policies?
4. Which roles within your organisation bring with them specific work-life balance challenges? How do you address these?
5. How do you address the work-life balance needs of employees with specific challenges (e.g. single parents, those with caring responsibilities for adults, those on shift-work)?
6. How do you communicate your organisation's approach to work-life balance?
7. What sort of evaluation have you conducted of your work-life balance policies / initiatives?
8. What sort of feedback have you had from employees with regard to work-life balance?
9. How has the present economic downturn has had an impact on how your employees view the importance of work-life balance?
10. How would you rate your organisation's approach to work-life balance when compared to other organisations in your sector?

## Appendix C: Example Interview Transcript and Codes

Interview Transcription Element	Initial Codification
<p><b>R: My first question is very general, which is: how do you approach work-life balance in your business?</b></p> <p>S: Badly</p> <p><b>R: Okay. What does badly look like?</b></p> <p>S: The best of intentions...</p> <p><b>R: Yeah</b></p> <p>S: Based on the theoretical knowledge that there is balance to be achieved between input and productivity.</p> <p><b>R: Hmm-mm</b></p> <p>S: Ummm....beyond a certain amount of input, productivity drops significantly. One's ability to determine, in the heat of the moment, at a personal level, what that point is, is quite difficult.</p> <p><b>R: Hmm-mmm</b></p> <p>S: Emm... Advising others of it is very easy. Living it is very difficult.</p>	<p><i>Conceptualisation of WLB as "balance" between "input and productivity"</i></p> <p><i>Negative impact of "imbalance" on business</i></p> <p><i>Demonstrating "balance" is difficult</i></p>
<p><b>R: When you say, badly, what does badly look like and what are you comparing yourself to?</b></p> <p>S: I think you look back retrospectively and recognise that actually the 6pm to 9pm period, you probably weren't that productive. And actually if you'd finished at 7, you would probably have achieved not a great deal</p>	<p><i>Time-based conceptualisation of</i></p>



<p>less and would probably be approaching things the next day with a little more recuperation and fitness to approach really. I think the other bit is you get quite operational and tactical and if you're constantly doing, your ability to work on the business rather than in the business... you get "in it" rather than "looking at it" from outside, dispassionately.</p>	<p><i>balance</i></p> <p><i>The need for recovery from work in the evening</i></p> <p><i>An operational versus strategic focus (due to workload?)</i></p>
<p><b>R: Yeah. In terms of trying to manage work-life balance as the CEO of the business, what approach would you take... how would you describe your approach?</b></p> <p>S: At a personal level?</p> <p><b>R: Throughout the business</b></p> <p>S: Yeah. My approach has always been one of... it's not about inputs, it's about outputs. Emm.. so I don't want to instil a culture where people feel compelled to work extended hours. And actually where I spot that going on, I will tell people...</p> <p>(Interruption)</p> <p>S: Em.. so... I suppose my approach is quite paternalistic actually, in a way. I am more specific with more junior members of staff. And will mention it to them and ask them why there is a need and if there's a genuine need then try to restructure things so that need is not there. However, if it's about someone not performing effectively, efficiently, then work with them to determine how they can do the job that they're required to do without reasonable working hours. I think at a more senior level, I think I have a much more stand-back approach. You know... the leash is a lot longer, but similarly... there comes a point when I</p>	<p><i>A "paternalistic" approach</i></p> <p><i>Division of staff into senior and junior, the latter need more attention?</i></p> <p><i>"Leash" in long for senior staff</i></p> <p><i>Impact of inefficient working hours, relation</i></p>

<p>intervene and have conversations with people. Emm... as an individual, I am I guess what you would call not a complete workaholic, but I probably work more than most people.</p> <p><b>R: Okay</b></p> <p>S: But I don't think people should model that necessarily</p>	<p><i>to productivity</i></p> <p><i>"Reasonable" working hours (Time-based)</i></p> <p><i>Own long working hours (is he a role model?) – time-based emphasis. Do as I say, not as I do...</i></p>
<p><b>R: Okay. Emm... if I was to contrast how you approach work-life balance as an issue for the organisation with some other organisations out there, they focus on policies... have you... do you work to policies that you've written up around work-life balance?</b></p> <p>S: No.</p> <p><b>R: No</b></p> <p>S: Emm... I don't like policies. I would much rather take a humanistic approach and work with people. I think we have a responsibility, a duty of care, as managers, as people, to people we manage... to our co-workers... for ... getting involved in such issues. I don't think you can control cultural aspects by policies particularly easily. People will find a way around. And quite often in many organisations that I know, it's just rhetoric... it's there for compliance purposes. Emm.. but actually... but you know, to be fair, we do ask people as part of their contract of employment... employment offer... to opt out of the working time directive. Emm... so I think people should have the freedom to put in or not as appropriate.</p>	<p><i>No WLB policies in place.</i></p> <p><i>Dislike of policies.</i></p> <p><i>Managers have a duty of care</i></p> <p><i>Opt-out of working time directive seen as "freedom"?</i></p>

<p><b>R: How do you monitor then... emm... hours, first of all, and what's your approach to monitoring the hours that individuals put in?</b></p> <p>S: I think again, two levels of staff here. And there is a real distinction for me there. There is an absolute duty to be on top of that with the - what shall we call them? – non-professional staff. I think with the professional staff...</p> <p>(Interruption)</p> <p>S: I think with the professional staff, they've got to take a level of responsibility. It's about being aware... I have dialogue with people on a weekly basis, and understanding ... you've got to understand where each person is at and what pressures they're feeling. If you're not doing that, it's just part of general management, then you're not doing your job as a manager.</p>	<p><i>Division of staff into "professional" and "non-professional" – differing standards and expectations?</i></p> <p><i>A focus on "non-professional" staff, "professionals" have to take responsibility</i></p> <p><i>Also an individual focus</i></p>
<p><b>R: Okay. So... to paraphrase you, it's sort on an ongoing observation approach, rather than a process-driven or clocking-on, clocking-off...</b></p> <p>S: We don't measure utilisation, we don't measure any inputs here. Emm.. personal preference, actually. Emm... but it's also something about creating an environment where someone can come to you and have that conversation. If they're feeling that they can't get the balance they need in their life...</p> <p><b>R: Yeah</b></p> <p>S: And have that dialogue with you and not be fearful of having that dialogue with you.</p> <p><b>R: And what d you do to arrive at that situation where people feel comfortable to raise those</b></p>	<p><i>No measurement of hours worked, or utilisation.</i></p> <p><i>Attempting to foster open environment to discuss WLB concerns</i></p>

<p><b>issues with you, the CEO?</b></p> <p>S: I think, you know, I don't encourage a power-distance relationship type structure in the business. I don't communicate with people in that way. I think by certain aspects of my personality I guess I can be quite... seen as quite forceful may be, or... strong or whatever that is and that counts against that. But actually, if you peel that veneer away, the next level is for me about wanting to have an absolute duty of care.. a responsibility for individuals in the company and for their progression through life more broadly. And I think those relationships outlive the company. I think they really do. And it's... partly it's altruistic and partly it's recognition that you need people who are healthy, balanced... to be productive.</p>	<p><i>Dialogue re. WLB</i></p> <p><i>Avoiding power-distance</i></p> <p><i>Duty of care for staff</i></p> <p><i>Need to have healthy, "balanced" staff &gt;&gt; productivity</i></p>
<p><b>R: So if you were to describe what you see as the benefits of having a team with a good work-life balance, what would those be?</b></p> <p>S: I think it's morally right in the first place. You need to define what that balance point is. And that varies between individuals; but I think there's a moralistic point to that, which sits outside of harsh corporate things. But then there's the corporate thing... we're running marathons, we're not running sprints. If we want people there for the duration, then they've got to run at an appropriate base. If they run too fast, then they're going to burn out. We're running a marathon</p> <p><b>R: So sustainability, in a sense?</b></p> <p>S: Exactly, exactly...</p>	<p><i>Good WLB = moral</i></p> <p><i>Notion of an individual "Balance point"</i></p> <p><i>Marathons not sprints, need for sustainability</i></p>

	<i>Avoiding burnout</i>
<p><b>R: Again, bearing in mind the size of the organisation... large corporates can evaluate their policies or their initiatives because they're large by their nature...they have processes. How do you evaluate or test the waters to see if your way of working around this is actually working?</b></p> <p>S: I like to understand how people are feeling.. I mean, I rely a lot in a management sense, on one to one meetings</p> <p><b>R: Okay</b></p> <p>S: Yeah. I have a one to one meeting at least every four weeks with each person, and I like to do it more regularly than that. Emm... if they're more regular, they're probably shorter in duration, whereas every four weeks, you can get a reasonable amount of depth. And I hope that actually through that interaction, I can understand where people are at emotionally... and that any issues associated with a lack of balance would come through.. would fall through those. That really is the barometer for me of where people are and their cycle. And I guess it's an approach to management... like a continual coaching and developing... there's two aspects: there's a task orientation and a human orientation. And maybe there's a lot going on here, beyond the observable task stuff</p> <p><b>R: So... what's visible versus what's internal in terms of work?</b></p> <p>S: Yeah</p>	<p><i>Using one-to-one meetings to keep abreast of individuals' needs</i></p> <p><i>Looking for issues coming from "Lack of balance"</i></p> <p><i>Coaching and developing</i></p> <p><i>Task vs human orientation</i></p>
<p><b>R: Do you think there's any roles... within the organisation that bring with them work-life balance challenges?</b></p>	

<p>S: I mean, part-time roles bring work-life balance challenges...</p> <p><b>R: Hm-mm.</b></p> <p>S: Because the business day doesn't stop, you know, on a Wednesday night at 5 o'clock. It continues on a Thursday and Friday. And with communications the way they are, people are bombarded still. Umm... I think with some people who work less than full time there's a feeling of they're not contributing in quite the way of people who work full time... but actually, there's a contract there... they contracted for a certain period and they're remunerated for a certain period. That's what the deal is and you know... so I don't think there's any reason they should contribute more than that contractual relationship. But I think they do. You know. You look at certain people who work less than 100% time... they get communicated with during the rest of their working week, and they respond. I think it's difficult. They have a desire to support their team.. a function of being umm... how would you say... part of the organisation, being part of the team, being committed to it. So they don't want to let people down. So they do respond. And they chip away at their own time. If someone works three days, you always get more than three days.</p> <p><b>R: Yeah</b></p> <p>S: If someone works five days, they'll probably just work five days. How you get out of that one, I don't know. Because it's em... it's a part of if they're engaged and motivated, they want to contribute and help their team members when they're not around. So how you stop them doing that I'm not entirely sure. Other than for them to understand there isn't a ... they're not compelled to do it, it's their choice. Yeah? We had an issue a while back, didn't we? We talked about it about six months ago... about respecting people's time. And I think we've home some way to improving that. Moving in the right direction there... maybe not as far as we could go. But it comes back to a definition of work-life balance, what it is for different</p>	<p><i>Part-time roles a challenge</i></p> <p><i>Working week doesn't match part-time hours</i></p> <p><i>Employee psychological contract versus written contract?</i></p> <p><i>Part-time staff working longer hours than contracted</i></p> <p><i>Receiving communications outside contracted working hours</i></p> <p><i>Part-time staff</i></p>
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<p>people...</p> <p><b>R: Yeah</b></p> <p>S: It depends where they see they future, their destiny, their trajectory. For me, the achievement is... it's a combination of being smart and working hard. Em... and the less smart you are, the harder you have to work. And the smarter you are, probably the less hard you have to work. So... and what you're overall ambition and goal is. And I don't know anybody who is an entrepreneur like a Dragon's Den type entrepreneur who isn't really a workaholic. Certainly in the earlier parts of their career. And I think what they do is get to a point and there's only actually... talking big picture stuff here... three ways to make money in life. Either you build some intellectual property and you sell that on an ongoing basis and that creates a revenue stream. You borrow money and you invest that and it gives you a nice return. And thirdly is actually leveraging other people as resources. Um... so I think once they've built a successful business as an entrepreneur, they maybe don't have to do maybe quite as much as they did to get there, once they've got there. But to get there, it's a huge amount of effort and energy and a lot of sacrifices in most cases. But not everyone has that aspiration.</p>	<p><i>continue to work to avoid letting their colleagues down</i></p> <p><i>Working longer hours related to engagement with the business? A choice?</i></p> <p><i>How to prevent longer than contracted hours?</i></p> <p><i>WLB different for different people</i></p> <p><i>Individual focus, individual motivation;</i></p> <p><i>Working smart vs working hard</i></p> <p><i>Time-based references; working longer hours early in career.</i></p> <p><i>Not everyone is an entrepreneur</i></p>
<p><b>R: Thinking of those people, the founders, the start-ups, the entrepreneurs... do you think they necessarily view their own work-life balance as being ... um... in debt as opposed to credit or are</b></p>	

<p><b>they getting what they actually want?</b></p> <p>S: They're getting what they want. And I think what they want out of life is what they do. You know we see examples round here... people who are quite elderly, who don't want to retire despite having the visible means to do so.</p>	<p><i>Individuals making choices about what they want from work</i></p>
<p><b>R: Do you... when you look at organisations that you would either call competitors competitors, or in the same space, how would you rate work-life balance in this organisation, compared to them?</b></p> <p>S: I think a lot of organisations are quite heavily focussed on process and measuring input. I don't ever want us to go there as a business. Emm... There will come a point when we need to take some quite coarse measurements to run a business, but it won't be a purely metric driven business, unlike a lot of businesses are, especially a lot of consultancies.</p> <p><b>R: Yeah</b></p> <p>S: But I think there is a requirement to monitor it from a management perspective. But I think the other bit is, if your people are engaged, and want to work, then that's absolutely okay for them to do that. I don't think we should be taking the view that you should be working these hours. If people want to work more hours, and that's not detrimental to their wellbeing, then why stop them?</p> <p><b>R: Yeah. So you would take the view that the wellbeing is the limit there? If it's negatively impacting wellbeing, then that requires an intervention of some sort?</b></p> <p>S: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. I think that point is different for every person actually. There's individual differences in that. But I think the wellbeing is the absolute crux of it. Once it impacts on wellbeing, then</p>	<p><i>Avoiding focus on process and input.</i></p> <p><i>Not metrics-driven</i></p> <p><i>Individual choice to work longer hours</i></p> <p><i>Wellbeing is a determinant</i></p> <p><i>Intervention from management when</i></p>



<p>you need to intervene really.</p>	<p><i>wellbeing negatively impacted</i></p>
<p><b>R: The organisation itself is relatively small. Fewer than 20 employees here in the UK. How do you envisage this approach to work-life balance changing at all as the business grows?</b></p> <p>S: I think we've got a management team, once we've got the next person on board, who can take us to a £5m turnover as a business. That's the size of business I inherited at &lt;&lt;company x&gt;&gt; when I joined and that had about 80 employees Em.. and so long as that team, that management... it's from the top down... so long as the management team believe in this and cascade it appropriately, I don't know what it would need to change.</p> <p><b>R: Okay.</b></p> <p>S: I think it probably changes after £5m turnover, after the 100 employees size. But while we've still got this team that we've got, I would... I would guess that there's a degree of harmony in what I'm saying and what others are saying... I might be completely wrong but I don't think so. Why can't they cascade that?</p>	<p><i>Management team need to cascade appropriate messages</i></p>
<p><b>R: That raises an interesting question that I've encountered elsewhere which is about the role of line managers and implementation of policy or how we do things being dependent on them, their alignment, and at the core their ability to do that. Would you see this is something you would want them to explicitly understand, that it's part of their responsibility to look at the work-life balance of the people that report to them?</b></p> <p>S: Managers are coaches as far as I'm concerned. Two jobs: to help that individual on their path through life and to help that individual to contribute to the</p>	

<p>organisation. And those things are sometimes at odds and sometimes together. But you know... if the individual seems themselves as a coach, then definitely it's within their remit to deal with such issues. That's why we have no annual appraisal system, because I say to myself: why? This needs to be ongoing. There's no point in just having the discussion once a year... a box-ticking exercise. And as a group of psychologists on the management team... head of consultancy, R&amp;D, &lt;&lt;name&gt;&gt;, why shouldn't these people be coaches? And when I think we start to get some of the other functions, the other one that might come along is Head of Operations... although &lt;&lt;name&gt;&gt; might morph into that, which would take on legal and finance as well as IT. And certain administrative aspects of HR. That person who wouldn't have a psychological background, or &lt;&lt;name&gt;&gt; from a technical background... I think &lt;&lt;name&gt;&gt; is of a disposition that that is how he approaches the management of his people in any case. So, I think it's ... there's a more fundamental level... I don't think you can address is with policies, I think it's a more human intervention. And maybe it's not as explicit as it could be. Yeah.</p>	<p><i>Managers as coaches</i></p> <p><i>Need for ongoing conversations, rather than annual appraisals</i></p> <p><i>Senior managers as coaches</i></p> <p><i>Dislike for policies – instead a human intervention</i></p>
<p><b>R: Okay. One of the major themes in work-life balance is that of flexible working options and it's something at the top of many people's lists when they start talking about work-life balance. How do you feel about flexible working options and what does that look like to you?</b></p> <p>S: Em... as I say it's not about inputs to me, it's about outputs. So I'm not really bothered having rigid systems. But... em... given the nature of what we do, we need to be available at certain times. And if we can deliver what we need to deliver to achieve our corporate ambitions, and afford people the flexibility that they want then that's fine. I think that when they</p>	<p><i>Outputs rather than inputs</i></p>

<p>become at odds to one another then that's when it becomes quite difficult. Emm... do we have any examples of that? We do have a few example of that actually. Where people... who work full time and because of their childcare arrangements change their working hours, which means that other people are picking up more than their fair share. They're having to make up for other people. I think it's easier in a larger organisation, because you've got more pieces to play around with. In a small organisation, it can become quite difficult. If you've got to have two of a certain kind of person available at all times, and one wants to do these hours and one wants to do those hours...</p> <p><b>R: Something has to give?</b></p> <p>S: Something has to give sometimes. But where we can achieve it, then absolutely achieve it. We have a policy of... look at our management team... what percentage would that be? Dunno. 40% work less than 100% contract. And with a new person coming in, that person might work less, so it might be 60% of our management team working less than 100%, so I think that's pretty flexible actually. Umm... does that cause issues? Yeah, we have to have work-arounds. Absolutely. Are they such an issue? Not actually, because I'd rather have those people on that flexible basis than other people who might not be on a flexible basis.</p> <p><b>R: Mm-hmm. So it's also about attracting the right people?</b></p> <p>S: Absolutely. It's only about the people. And that's it. That's everything, as far as I'm concerned.</p>	<p><i>Provision of flexibility dependent on the business's ability to provide it</i></p> <p><i>Some employees picking up extra hours because others have childcare responsibilities</i></p> <p><i>Size of organisation presents challenges</i></p> <p><i>High proportion of part-time managers presents challenges</i></p> <p><i>Would rather have good part-time employees than not at all</i></p>
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	<i>Provision of flexibility as a way of attracting the best people?</i>
<p><b>R: Do you think the size of the business has an impact on your ability to be flexible? Do you think it's easier for a small business or a large?</b></p> <p>S: It's harder for a small business. Umm... It's harder... we've come across this in customer service recently. In my &lt;&lt;company name&gt;&gt; days, I had 30 consultants. So for "consultant of the day", they'd have to do it once every six weeks. Easy to do. When you've got 5 or seven, it's once a week or once every... it's that bit more difficult, you know? Where else is it more difficult? I think where you've got people... you know, one person with a skillset that isn't replicated elsewhere... if I've got a team of accountants, six or seven accountants, credit control clerks, book-keepers, doing the doing, it's fine. In this business, you just don't. Even the company I out-source it to is small. There's only four of them... two accountants and two book-keepers. If the two accountants are away, I'm snookered.</p> <p><b>R: Yeah.. so the small size brings challenges as well as opportunities for flexibility?</b></p> <p>S: Yeah.</p>	<p><i>Small size of business brings challenges</i></p> <p><i>Having specialises whose skills aren't replicated elsewhere in the business is a challenge</i></p>
<p><b>R: We've spoken about the temporal aspects... the hours that are done or the amount of time that's spent at work. How about location? Does where the work takes place matter to you?</b></p> <p>S: Emm... I think I recognise that we've got to be virtual. But I also recognise that whilst there's benefits in that for a lot of people – not have to do two-hour commutes each day – they can lounge in their lounge-wear... there's lots of benefits for the more introverted types... they can get the peace and quiet they need to</p>	

<p>get the job done. Emm... the difficulty is sometimes with communication. I think we've felt this more in the last year than we have previously, actually. As the business gets bigger and virtual – and increasingly virtual – the communication and the... it works in two ways. When everyone gets together they're all excited because they don't get together very often. And it's a good experience. I think the other side of it is... if you're not there, the more junior members of staff aren't picking up on stuff from the more professional members of staff. They're not hearing the phone calls... not getting involved in this conversation for 10 minutes, or this for half an hour. So I think that what we run the risk of here is... all the managers are working virtually and all the employees and staff are working in an office. So we've got research &amp; development... to some extent with technology... customer service, marketing...you know. All the chiefs are out there and all the workers are in there. It like, well...it's not ideal, is it? And there's been requests of me to be in the office more frequently. And I say why is that, because it's not my glowing company that you want. And they say: we just learn stuff. And you help us solve stuff.. the stuff that we don't have the courage to make decisions on... you just say do it and we do it. And that type of stuff. Virtual... it needs to be... I think you need to put support systems in place to get people to communicate on a regular basis. And I'm not sure that our once a month team meeting... well, we've just instigated this day in the office thing, and a night now... it's not bad. We can do more. And I think in time we will do more.</p>	<p><i>Virtual work</i></p> <p><i>Avoidance of commutes an advantage for some employees</i></p> <p><i>Can negatively impact communication though</i></p> <p><i>Face to face time beneficial</i></p> <p><i>Need for "professional" staff members to be present to give good example to junior staff</i></p> <p><i>Requests to be more present in the office</i></p> <p><i>In-office, learning from each other</i></p>
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